

OpenDoors
WORLD
WATCH
LIST 2018
-26th Edition-



**A GUIDE TO GLOBAL
PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS
2018**

ABOUT OPEN DOORS

Open Doors serves millions of persecuted Christians in over 60 countries, including some of the most dangerous places in the world. From our 25 offices, mainly in Western countries, we raise awareness among politicians as well as local churches, so they can support our fellow Christians, who cannot, like us, practice and live our their religion in freedom.

The World Watch List is your guide to global percecution. It shows how millions of Christians are finding it harder than ever to practise their faith. The World Watch List 2018 gives you an understanding of the reality for Christians around the world, and we hope that it will be great tool for you when speaking for and about religious freedom.

Our staff and partners work in places where Christians are faced with hostility, discrimination, violence, injustice, imprisonment, and even death. Working always **with local churches and partners** Open Doors supports persecuted Christians with **emergency Relief, Bibles, Christian materials, education, livelihood skills, advocacy**, and in a whole host of other ways, so that they know they are not forgotten and can stand strong to serve their communities.

Because this is not about maintenance. It's not about keeping the church going, just so that believers can continue to hold meetings. It's about keeping the light of the world shining in some of the darkest places on earth. **It's about strengthening the church so that she can truly be the church.**

In Finland, Open Doors works to **raise awareness of global persecution, mobilising support and action among Christians and in the whole of society.** Thanks to our supporters around the world, from Hong Kong to United States and Ireland, the persecuted Christians can stand strong in the knowledge that **they are not alone.** Across Finland many **pray, give, and speak out** for those who share our faith but not our freedom.

WELCOME TO THE WORLD WATCH LIST 2018

The World Watch List shows the 50 countries worldwide where Christians experience the most persecution. This survey is based on a comprehensive scoring system that measures the degree of freedom Christians have to live out their faith in five spheres of life; private, family, community, national, and church life plus a sixth sphere measuring levels of violence. The methodology provides "persecution points" for each sphere. As a result of the World Watch List process, each country gets a specific final score and is ranked accordingly.

North Korea is once again number one, as it has been since 2002, but this year **Afghanistan** almost tipped the scale. Worldwide, persecution of Christians has risen for the fifth year in a row, with Asia, particularly, showing a rapid rise. **Nepal** jumped onto the list as number 25 from not even being on the list, and **India** unfortunately again this year rises to an all-time high as number 11 from being number 15 last year. In **Laos, Bangladesh**, and tiny **Bhutan**, things are still getting more and more difficult for Christians. Buddhist nationalism has risen and many of the Buddhist countries are therefore ranked higher on the list than last year.

However, Islamic extremism fuels most of the top 20 countries, but this year not only in the Middle East but also in Asia, where a rapid growth of Islamic radicalism and terrorism are getting clearer, looking especially in the **Philippines** and **Bangladesh** where IS and its associates are on the rise. In Africa, the global spread of the Islamist movement means that Muslim areas in what was considered Christian countries such as **Kenya** and **Nigeria** are becoming more radical and are persecuting Christians, using Sharia law and expanding their territories with the support of Islamic nations in the Middle East such as Iran and Saudi Arabia.

We hope this book will not only inform you about the plight of persecuted Christians, but also inspire you to speak out for them. Christians around the world need our support more than ever and mentioning prisoners' names or speaking out for religious rights when venturing into collaboration with countries on the World Watch List makes a difference for the **215.000.000** Christians living under high levels of persecution.



Tahira church, Qaraqosh, Iraq

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Analysis of persecution of Christians 2018

Looking at the World Watch List (WWL) 2018 it is clear that Christians and the Church are becoming less and less welcome on the global scene. Hostilities against Christians are increasing and becoming more widespread, leaving them seriously vulnerable in their religious freedom. Over the last years the annual World Watch List have shown this increase in hostility, and the WWL 2018 show that Africa (including the Middle East) and Asia are taking an unfortunate lead.

There are two global revolutionary movements that currently threaten the freedom of religion of Christians: the islamist revolutionary movement and the spread of religious nationalism in Asia. The push of radical Muslims driving the islamist revolutionary movement aims at bringing many parts of the world under Sharia law, in many cases eradicating the church or pressuring Christians to flee or go underground. The push of religious nationalism in Asia, especially nationalist Hinduism and Buddhism, are gaining more and more ground. It means that on both a local and a political level 'To be Indian is to be Hindu.' Or: 'To be Myanmar is to be Buddhist'. These religions may have the reputation of being peaceful in the West, but that is not how Christians and other religious minorities in those countries experience them.

1. Religious nationalism

Religious nationalism in Asia is like a tsunami that increases in velocity and height the closer it gets to shore. It sweeps over the continent, destroying many lives. This is compounded by the fact that in some countries parties that uphold nationalist ideology have become governments, thus giving further impetus to the nationalist movements.

In 2014, India reached rank 28 on the World Watch List (WWL) with a score of 55 points. This year, on the WWL 2018, it reached rank 11 with 81 points. 2017 was a record year in terms of persecution incidents (i.e. threats, social exclusion, abuse, imprisonment, etc.) with over 600 incidents being reported. But as most cases remain unreported, the true number is much higher. The root cause for the increase of persecution in India is the growing Hindutva movement, a nationalistic drive to 'Hinduize' India. Christians are confronted with social exclusion, expulsion from their villages, detention, threats, abuse, violence and sometimes killings. Unfortunately, Nepal follows in the footsteps of its 'big brother'. It did not appear in the WWL 2017 Top 50, but entered at rank 25 on WWL 2018 with a score of 64. The government as well as local communities became more active in persecuting Christians. Here, too, was a steep rise in the number of people being physically abused for their faith in Jesus.

Religious nationalism is not only limited to India and Nepal; the Buddhist world is confronted with this trend as well. Persecution in countries such as Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Myanmar manifests itself differently and is much more subtle. For example, if parents want their children to be educated, they have to send them to Buddhist schools. There, the children have to take part in classes that teach Buddhism. They are also forced to participate in Buddhist rituals. In other words, during their day at school they live as Buddhists, which undermines their Christian faith. There are also many legislative restrictions against Christians, who often, for example, do not receive a permit to rent a place to hold religious meetings.

2. The islamist movement and other forms of islamism

The growing islamist movement is a threat for Christians and other non-Muslim communities in many parts of the world but most clearly on the African and Asian continent. Islamism is that part of Islam which embraces a clear political agenda for bringing nations under Muslim domination and Sharia law. In this respect, it is not only a threat to the freedom of religion, but also to nations where the movement is active. The rising conflicts between Sunni and Shia Muslims, which are leading to proxy wars in different countries and in their surrounding regions, also poses a threat to the safety and religious freedom of Christians.

In Africa

With the global rise and spread of the islamist movement, Christians are facing increasing persecution in Muslim majority countries in East, West and North Africa. The rising level of persecution can be seen in the increasing pressure on Christians in their day-to-day life and their interaction with ordinary people such as neighbors, colleagues or relatives. In addition to such societal pressure, the proliferation of militant islamist groups is increasingly putting the life and security of Christians at risk. An example is Egypt, where it has been clear that within the WWL 2018 reporting period, groups like Islamic State (IS) are determined to wipe out Christians from the region through violence. The group has been explicit about its intentions to cleanse the region from Christians in its own statements and declaration.

Another example of the spread of islamist movement is the sub-Saharan African countries. Here the political liberalization that swept through West Africa in the 1990s was an opportunity for Arab states, with Saudi Arabia in the lead, to pour money into the new Islamic associations and NGOs that emerged from the ashes of the military or single-party dictatorships that once held sway in the region. These associations and NGOs expanded madrassas and Islamic schools to spread radical Islamic and Wahhabist views, bypassing traditional mosques to become focal points for proselytizing and disseminating radical ideology. The effect of all this can be seen below the Top 50 where a relatively high number of sub-Saharan African countries are moving up in the direction of the Top 50.

In Asia

Having lost ground in the Middle East, Islamic State is moving elsewhere for greener pastures namely Asia, home to one of the biggest Muslim population in the world. Unless government and civil society come up with systemic ways of preventing another upsurge of terrorism, then the chances that IS gains ground in Asia are high. Why? Because the seeds of home-grown terrorism have been there for decades already and with internet and social media it is just a matter of time before it spreads rapidly. Indonesia is fortunate to have a Head of National Police with a solid background in anti-terrorism intelligence, but other Asian countries are not so fortunate.

In Asia, everyone watched in shock as the incidents in Marawi Philippines unfolded. The regional governments knew it would happen one day, but now that radical Islamic militants (calling

themselves a branch of IS) were able to conquer a city of 200,000, it cannot be ignored any longer. The battle of Marawi was over after about 150 days. First attacked were a church and a Christian school, Christians were singled out and killed, others abducted. The question is: Where will the radicals go next? Of course, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore want to cooperate closer now, but the first two nations named have been lenient with the Islamic militants for too long, and it could happen that they get swallowed up too.

There has been an increase in Islamic militancy affecting almost all Asian countries: Recently hindered bomb attacks in Bangladesh and Indonesia, the political fall-out of ex-governor Ahok's convicted of blasphemy in Indonesia, the situation in Marawi and wider Mindanao (Philippines), the forging of an "Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army" in Myanmar and etc. Observers think that Marawi and the Rohingya issue may serve as a rallying cry to jihadists around the world, if they find the Middle East region increasingly uncomfortable.

Bangladesh has witnessed a gradual rise in attacks and Islamic fundamentalism is growing. Religious minorities, specifically Christian, Hindus, foreigners, and liberal writers, are the main targets. The South Asian Terrorism Portal writes in its Bangladesh Report of 2017 that "there is the threat of increasing radicalization, as significant numbers of youth appear to be attracted to the movements of global jihad." Multiple incidents not only point to an irrefutable growth in support for IS within Bangladesh but also to a general rise in radicalization. The current government has consistently denied the presence of international terrorist organizations like IS and al-Qaeda in the country despite growing evidence, and has taken a stand against secular critics stating that citizens have no right to write or speak against any religion. The government has also been accused of arbitrarily cracking down on political opponents, suffocating media and arresting critics.

The growing influence of Saudi Arabia in Maldives, Indonesia and other Asian countries is also very worrying. It has been aggressively expanding its financial prowess through numerous investment projects in gigantic sums. Along with the "neutral" investments are accompanying projects for building mosques and Islamic boarding schools. Accepting Wahhabism (the more fundamental/puritan streak of Islam) is just part of the deal. This in turn is creating intolerant societies where the freedom of religion is getting trampled underfoot.

The Sunni-Shia divide

An often underreported, but crucial aspect of violent hotspots in the world is the division between Sunni and Shia Muslims. It divides the global Muslim community in general but terrorist groups can also be divided among the lines of Shia vs. Sunni. Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (both worldwide movements), al-Nusra (Syria), al-Shabaab (Horn of Africa) and Boko Haram (West Africa) promote a radical version of Sunni Islam and use anti-Shia rhetoric, while Hezbollah (Lebanon) is the most well-known Shia terrorist group. A group such as the Houthis in Yemen is Shia as well, but they are only labeled as terrorists by Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Australia.

However, it is often seen that wherever Sunnis and Shia are fighting each other, Christians are easy targets and their neighborhoods easy to take control of. This has been seen in Iraq in the waves of sectarian violence following the ousting of Saddam Hussein. In the Sunni-Shia battle for power, influence and territory, Christians and their homes were often attacked.

Islamic expansionism into non-Muslim dominated areas

Islamic expansionism should be closely seen in the context of the Abuja Declaration. This declaration that was adopted in 1989 in Nigeria following a conference organized by the Organization of Islamic Conference (IOC). The objective of the declaration was to unite Muslims in Africa, and make Africa the first Islamic continent in the world. Although the declaration was quickly withdrawn from the internet after its initial publication, developments in the continent, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, seem to suggest this agenda is still being pursued by the Islamist movement. According to the East African Center for Law and Justice, one of the key but covert objectives of the declaration, even though not written on the public document is: "To eradicate in all its forms and ramifications all non-Muslim religions in member nations (such religions shall include Christianity, Ahmadiyya and other tribal modes of worship unacceptable to Muslims)."

Ethnic cleansing based on religious affiliation

Ethnic cleansing based on religious affiliation is evident in a growing number of sub-Saharan African countries. This aptly describes the dynamics created by agents of political Islam against the presence of Christians in what they consider their territory within countries. What is happening in northeast Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan can be considered typical examples, in some cases even coming close to genocide.

The situation has become very worrying for the future of religious freedom in the African subcontinent. Many majority-Christian countries have become stratified between Islam and Christianity as a result of the strategy of political Islam. Sometimes this stratification exists at a very local level; at other times it covers large areas. This Islamic stratification movement is twofold: Majority-Muslim areas within countries seek to consolidate and to side-step national legislation (for instance by setting up informal Sharia courts), and at the same time these areas continue to try to expand into majority-Christian areas. This expansion may be combined with serious violence, but many governments are not able to create stable states that can protect their citizens. This easily leads to a vicious circle in which governments are side-lined or co-opted, giving in to perpetrators of persecution for the sake of 'peace'. By doing so, they surrender their Christian populations to practices of ethnic cleansing, if not genocide.

1 NORTH KOREA

Leader:
Kim Jong-un

Population:
25.4 million (300,000 Christians)

Main religion:
Atheism/ traditional beliefs

Government:
Communist dictatorship

Source of persecution:
Dictatorial paranoia

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: 1, WWL 2016 Position: 1



Where persecution comes from

The main driver of persecution in North Korea is the state. For three generations, everything in the country focused on worshipping the leading Kim-family. The paranoia of the leader has increased with the country's growing isolation especially considering the recent series of nuclear and missile tests and resulting sanctions. Christians are seen as hostile elements in society which have to be eradicated. Due to the constant indoctrination of the whole country, neighbours and even family members are highly watchful and report anything suspicious to the authorities. Especially children can believe in the indoctrination so strongly that they report their own parents, convinced that they are doing something good and right. Therefore, many parents prefer not to tell their children anything about their Christian faith.

How Christians are suffering

If Christians are discovered, no matter if they for generations have belong to a Christian community or if they just have become Christians not only are they deported to labor camps as political criminals or even killed on the spot, their families will share their fate as well. Christians do not even have the slightest space in society, on the contrary, they are publically warned against. Meeting other Christians in order to worship is almost impossible and if some believers dare to, it has to be done in utmost secrecy. The churches shown to visitors in Pyongyang serve to our knowledge only propaganda purposes.

Examples

- ▶ There are raids against Christians and killings, wrongful imprisonment and torture, but no details about native North Korean Christians can be published for security reasons.
- ▶ Several foreign pastors are detained and sentenced for acts against the state due to their Christian faith. Canadian-Korean pastor Hyeon Soo Lim was released from prison in August due to medical circumstances after 2 years imprisonment, after being sentenced lifetime in prison for crime against the state. US citizen Pastor Dong-cheol Kim who is born Korean, however, is still detained in North Korea.
- ▶ Two Korean-American Christians and lecturers at the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST), Tony Kim and Hak-song Kim, were arrested in April and May 2017. North Korea accused them of behaviour against the regime and they are still in prison today.

2 AFGHANISTAN

Leader:
President Ashraf Ghani

Population:
34.2 million (Thousands of Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Islamic republic

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism/Ethnic antagonism

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: 3, WWL 2016 Position: 4



Where persecution comes from

Since Afghanistan is per constitution an Islamic state, all other religions are seen as alien to the country and therefore government officials have been hostile towards any signs of Christianity. This is true for ethnic group leaders, religious leaders and citizens. The tribal community in Afghanistan is much stronger and more important than the state. Anyone changing his or her religion to Christianity is seen as leaving this community. In most cases, conversion brings shame for the family, and family members will do all in their power to bring the convert back to Islam or to atone for the shame. Additionally, radical Islamic militants, such as the Islamic State group (new on the scene) or the Taliban, are expanding their control and rule over more than 40% of the country already.

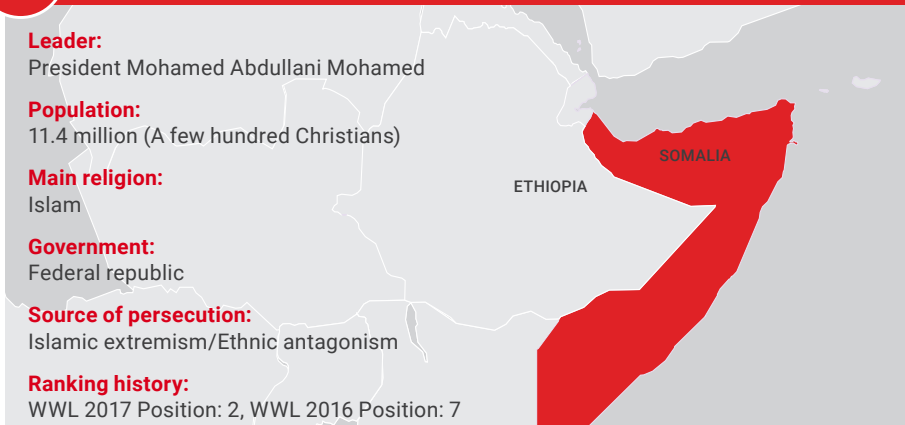
How Christians are suffering

All Christians in Afghanistan are converts and are not able to live their faith openly, neither alone nor in community and have to stay in utmost hiding. There is a small expatriate Christian community in Kabul, mostly comprised of diplomats and members of the international forces, but they are only free to worship in the highly secured diplomatic zone. The expatriate Christian community is therefore not considered for WWL scoring.

In many cases, converts are simply considered insane, for no-one in his right mind would even think of leaving Islam. If they cannot be convinced to return to their old faith, they may end up in a psychiatric hospital, beaten up by neighbours and friends and/or having their houses destroyed. Depending on the family, they might even be killed. Due to the extreme pressure, some Christians have to leave the country.

Examples:

- ▶ Any acts of worship put Christian believers at risk. As all religious 'changes' are noticed and reported, this often means families have to relocate as neighbourhood pressure and the influence of the Taliban or Islamic State group is strong. If found even exploring any faith other than Islam (and especially if suspected of having converted), the penalty can be death and it depends on the family situation what the consequences are. If it is discovered that they are even only exploring Christianity, e.g. by checking the internet, immediate action is taken trying to re-indoctrinate them until they and their community of believers comply. This can mean torture.
- ▶ There are reports of converts being killed, but for security reasons no details can be published. The level of violence against Christians is illustrated, however, by the killing of a Christian aid worker who lived in Afghanistan for 13 years and originated from Germany. She was targeted and killed in Kabul on 20 May 2017. The Afghan guarding the compound was beheaded.



Where persecution comes from

The two main sources of persecution in Somalia are the radical militant group al-Shabaab and the tribal system in the country. Society's Islamic clan system has a profound impact on how the federal government is structured. Al-Shabaab is also relying on the same clan-based structure to gather intelligence, recruit members and advance its ideology. The group is using this structure to force sheiks and imams to teach jihad or face expulsion or death. This is compounded by the fact that there are networks of organized crime used to fund radical groups like al-Shabaab. Society expects all Somalis to be a Muslim. Imams in mosques and madrasas as well as the leaders of al-Shabaab state publicly that there is no room for Christianity, Christians and churches in Somalia. The country's Constitution states that Islam is the state religion and the government prohibits any celebration of Christmas.

How Christians are suffering

The only Christian community in the country that is considered for WWL analysis are the Christians with a Muslim background. They are regarded as a high-value target by al-Shabaab operatives and have often been killed on the spot when discovered. The violent non-state actor, al-Shabaab, subscribes to the doctrine of Wahhabism and advocates Sharia law as the basis for regulating all aspects of life in Somalia. Foreign jihadists are also present in the country, but Islamic oppression is not limited to militants only. Christians also face serious persecution from family, extended family members and the community at large. Any conversion to Christianity is regarded as a betrayal of Somali family and clan. As a result, if Somalis are suspected of being converts, family members and clan leaders will harass, intimidate and even kill them. Over the last years, the situation appears to have worsened. Islamic militants intensified their hunt for people who are Christian and in a position of leadership. An attempt to reopen a church in Hargeisa, Somaliland, also failed as the government was forced to shut it down due to pressure from the local Islamic population.

Examples

- ▶ In the WWL 2018 reporting period many shops and businesses of suspected converts were destroyed and at least three converts were forced to leave the country, and at least eight have been forced to relocate inside the country.
- ▶ In addition, sources report that at least 23 Christians have been killed because they were suspected of being converts, however details cannot be published in order to protect family and friends.
- ▶ Suspected female converts to Christianity are often victims of forced marriage.



Where persecution comes from

Persecution comes from the government and radical Muslims and is systematic and reminiscent of a policy of ethnic cleansing. Under the authoritarian rule of President al-Bashir and his party, there is no rule of law in Sudan; press and media laws are restrictive, and freedom of expression has been highly curtailed. Historically, Islam is deeply embedded in Sudan's society and the government is strictly implementing the policy of one religion, one culture and one language. Since South Sudan declared its independence from Sudan in 2011, thousands of Christians have moved to South Sudan.

How Christians are suffering

The WWL 2018 reporting period has been tough in many ways: It has been tough because Christians are losing their churches, the government has arrested or intimidated many Christian leaders and at least on one occasion the government exerted huge pressure on churches to hand over leadership of their comities.

The ethnic-cultural landscape of the country is also complicated: Arab versus ethnic African, Muslim versus Christian. The secession of South Sudan in 2011 did not solve these problems. But all Christians are, despite what ethnic group they belong, afraid revealing their faith to Muslims as this might be seen as an 'act that encourages to apostasy against Islam'. The level of persecution that converts and ethnic Africans face is enormous. There have been arrests with charges of espionage; many churches have been demolished and others are on an official list awaiting demolition in 2017; many Christians are attacked indiscriminately in areas like the Nuba Mountains where there is an ongoing conflict between government forces and rebel groups. So as not to be discovered, converts will often refrain from raising their children Christian because it might attract the attention of the government and community leaders (since children might inadvertently reveal their faith) and converts are also often forced to be buried according to Islamic rites in Muslim cemeteries.

Examples

- ▶ Christian converts with a Muslim background are particularly at risk since the law officially punishes conversion from Islam to another religion by death. They usually refrain from owning Christian books or accessing Christian media as this could be used as evidence against them at a later point.
- ▶ An extreme level of violence against Christians is evident. Even though it has been difficult to get exact details about the number of Christians killed, it is clear that Christians are being targeted especially in the Nuba Mountains region by government forces. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, at least 3 known Christians were killed. Pastors are being prosecuted for speaking out against persecution in the country and the government closed down more than 20 churches in 2017.



Where persecution comes from

In Pakistan, radical Islamic groups do not just exist, they flourish and expand because some of them are courted by political parties, the army and the government. Especially the army continues to follow a policy of distinguishing between good and bad Taliban, which is widely followed by the government. Until this changes, radical Islamic groups will continue to run thousands of madrassas where no-one knows what is taught or how they are financed. These schools are able to stir up citizens especially the youth all across the country encouraging them to act against religious minorities such as Christians. Converts face these hostile forces as well, but for them the main danger comes from their own families as conversion away from Islam is a great shame for the family.

How Christians are suffering

Historic churches have relative freedom for worship and other activities, however, they are heavily monitored and have before 2017 regularly been targeted for bomb attacks. Christian churches more active in outreach and youth work face stronger persecution in society. All Christians suffer from institutionalized discrimination, illustrated by the fact that occupations seen as low, dirty and derogatory are officially reserved for Christians. Many Christians are poor and several are victims of bonded labour. On the other hand, there are many Christians belonging to the middle class as well, but this does not save them from being marginalized or persecuted. The country's notorious blasphemy laws target all religious minorities, but affect the Christian minority in particular.

Examples

- ▶ Two Chinese Christians, working in Pakistan, 24 year-old Li Xinheng and 26 year-old Meng Lisi, in May 2017 were killed by militants connected to the Islamic State group which accused them of proselytizing.
- ▶ Christians continue to be killed due to blasphemy accusations, but also due to their neglected status. On 1 June 2017, a Christian sewage worker died in the hospital of Umar Kot, Sindh Province, because three Muslim doctors refused to touch him as this would have made them unclean during their Ramadan fast. Further killings were recorded in the WWL 2018 reporting period, but no successful major attack against a Christian church in 2017.



Where persecution comes from

Since 1993 the country's regime and leaders has become synonymous with absolute authoritarianism, and they are doing everything to maintain their power. The regime has arrested, harassed and killed Christians because they are considered a threat to state and government. Approximately half of the Eritrean population is Muslim and most Muslims reside in the lowlands along the Red Sea Coast. Eritrean Muslims are showing a tendency towards radicalism mainly due to the increase in Islamic militancy in the region. This means that Christians living in those areas are particularly vulnerable, especially converts from Islam. Eritrean Muslims are "Muslims first" and "Eritrean second". Conversion to Christianity is seen as a betrayal of community, family and Islamic faith. The Eritrean Orthodox Church (EOC) has a long historical presence in the country and pressure and even persecution is sometimes put on other types of Christians.

How Christians are suffering

In Eritrea, all Christian communities are affected by persecution even though the intensity and sources of persecution may vary. Arrests and forced disappearance are very common in the country. Christians are being forced to join the armed forces, and especially Protestants face serious problems in accessing community resources, especially social services provided by the state. Christians from non-traditional church groups face the harshest persecution both from the government and from the EOC. Both converts from a Muslim background and cross-denominational converts from an Orthodox background face harsh mistreatment from their families and communities. Government security forces conducted many house-to-house raids and arrested hundreds of Christians forcing some Christians to flee the country.

Examples:

- ▶ In the WWL 2018 reporting period, government security forces conducted numerous raids on Christians and house-churches and arrested hundreds of Christians. These Christians are being held by the government in miserable conditions, some in shipping containers in scorching temperatures.
- ▶ Thousands of Christians have been arrested and imprisoned over the years, some of whom still remain in prison. Some of the notable Christians imprisoned are: Haile Naigzhi, leader of Eritrea's Full Gospel Church (arrested in 2004); Kiflu Gebremeskel, pastor of Southwest Full Gospel Church (arrested in 2004); Million Gebreselasie, medical doctor and pastor of Massawa Rhema Church (arrested in 2004); Tekleab Menghistieab, medical doctor and priest (arrested in 2004); Gebremedhin Gebregiorgis, priest (arrested in Nov 2004); Kidane Weldou, pastor of the Full Gospel Church (missing but believed to be in prison); and Abune Antonios, Eritrean Orthodox Patriarch (under house arrest since 2007).

Leader:
Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj

Population:
6.4 million (41,700 Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Provisional government

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: 11, WWL 2016 Position: 10



Where persecution comes from:

Islamic militant groups and organized crime are the two main causes of Christian persecution in Libya. Libya is a country in which Christians are a very small minority, mostly made up of foreigners in search of work or a means of reaching Europe by crossing the Mediterranean. Christian migrants from sub-Saharan African countries face not only intolerance from the general population but also racial prejudice. Islamic militant groups that have proliferated since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 are an additional source of danger for Christians in Libya. Societal pressure and persecution from immediate and extended family members is also a problem that converts with a Muslim background face in the country. The state of anarchy and civil war has also made the situation worse for Christians by creating an environment of impunity in which organized criminal groups and Islamist militant groups can attack Christians without any fear of consequences.

How Christians are suffering:

Libyan Christians with a Muslim background face very violent and intense pressure from their family and the wider community to renounce their faith. Foreigners from other parts of the continent are also targeted by various Islamic militant groups and organized criminal groups. These groups kidnap Christians and there have also been instances in which Christians have been killed in a very brutal and shocking manner. Even when they do not face such a fate, Christians from sub-Saharan Africa are harassed, often held in detention centers and subjected to threats from radical Islamists. Christians who publicly express their faith and try to share the Gospel with others also face the risk of arrest and violence. The absence of a single central government to impose law and order in the country has made the situation for Christians precarious. The level of violence against Christians in Libya is very high and Christians are subjected to very violent, inhumane and degrading treatment.

Examples:

- ▶ Several Coptic Christians who were trying to go back to Egypt were detained in a prison in Tripoli's airport for two weeks where they were flogged twice a day during which in November 2016, two Egyptian Christians were executed in Libya by a group called Ansar al-Sharia due to their faith.
- ▶ A report by Amnesty International gives a clear indication of what Christians are currently going through: A 26-year-old from Eritrea who was held in a detention center in al-Zawiya, is quoted as saying: "They hate Christians. If you're a Christian, all I can say is God help you if they find out...If they see a cross or a religious tattoo they beat you a lot more". Another former detainee said that guards in the detention center would separate the men according to religion and flog those who were Christians. A 22-year-old man from Eritrea who was beaten in detention after his boat was intercepted, stated: "They beat me, took my money and threw away my Bible and cross."

Leader:
President Fuad Masum

Population:
38.7 million (258,000 Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Parliamentary democracy

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism

WWL 2017 Position: 7, WWL 2016 Position: 2



Where persecution comes from

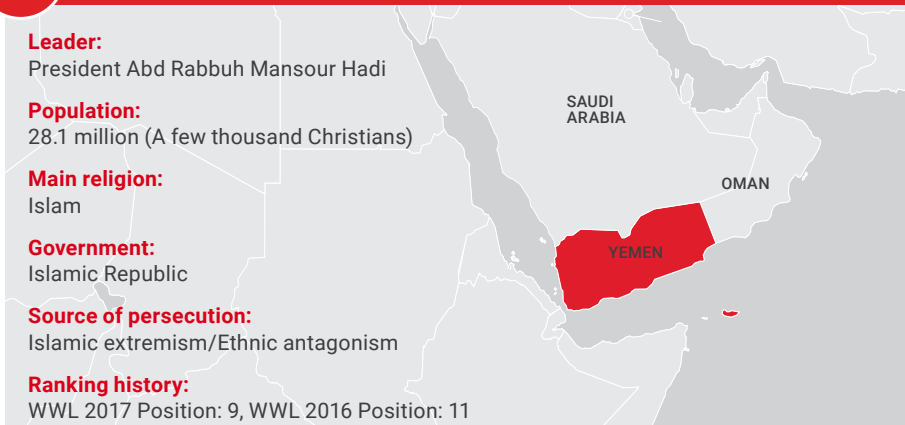
Fanatical movements such as the Islamic State group (IS) and other radical militants are known for targeting Christians and other religious minorities through kidnappings and killings. Although IS has almost completely lost its territory in Iraq, its ideology is not dead and has influenced the local population. The idea that Christians are infidels and 'not clean' has spread widely. Also, an estimated 3,000 IS militants from Mosul have reportedly 'disappeared' into the general population. Although some Christian families have returned to their homes, the emigration of Christians is continuing due to fear and lack of hope for a good future. For Christians in the north, the aftermath of the referendum on Kurdish independence has also played a role in this desire to leave. Further persecution occurs through Islamic leaders at any level, mostly in the form of hate speech in mosques. Government officials at all levels are reported to threaten Christians and 'encourage' them to emigrate.

How Christians are suffering

Christians with a Muslim background experience most pressure from family and often keep their faith a secret as they risk being threatened by family, clan leaders and the society around them. Converts risk losing inheritance rights and the right or means to marry. To openly leave Islam leads to difficult situations throughout the country and was especially dangerous in IS held territory. In the centre and the south of the country, besides facing oppression from extended family, converts also experience pressure from the government in Baghdad as Iraqi legislation is based on Sharia Law which stipulates that converts from Islam should be killed. Almost all churches in Iraq are all seriously affected by persecution, especially from fanatical Islamic movements and non-Christian leaders. They also face discrimination from government authorities. In central and southern Iraq, Christians often do not publicly display Christian symbols (such as a cross) as this can lead to harassment or discrimination at check-points, universities, work places and government buildings. Blasphemy laws can be used against them too if they are suspected of outreach among Muslims.

Examples

- ▶ During the WWL 2018 reporting period, there were several incidents of Christians with a Muslim background being physically attacked, tortured or kidnapped by their families as a result of their conversion. At least 58 Christians were held by IS in Mosul during the WWL 2018 reporting period and are currently still missing. It is unknown whether they were killed or abducted.
- ▶ A large number of Christian owned houses and property were damaged or looted and thousands of Christians continued to seek a safe place to live either inside or outside the country.



Where persecution comes from:

The following drivers of persecution are active in Yemen: government officials at any level from local to national, fanatical movements, extended family, ethnic group leaders and non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national.

Government officials create and maintain a strict Islamic system that treats all nationals as Muslims. In many areas the Saudi-led military intervention has created power vacuums allowing groups like Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda affiliates to expand their operations, and even kill Christians (both Yemeni Christians with a Muslim background and foreigners). Abductions occur as well, often due to a mixture of financial and anti-Christian motives. Converts from Islam to Christianity are mostly suffering from violence and pressure from their extended family but also from tribal leaders, if their new faith is discovered. Local imams are reported to have played a role in instigating attacks on Christians.

How Christians are suffering:

The Church in Yemen is composed mostly of communities of Yemeni Christians with a Muslim background. Migrant Christians, particularly from Africa and also from Asia, remain in the country though many have left due to the devastating war. Migrant Christians face harassment and discrimination from society at community and national level, and even outspoken violence from radical Islamic movements. Christians with a Muslim background face an even higher degree of persecution and effectively need to live their faith in secret. They face persecution from authorities (including detention), family, and radical Islamic groups who threaten apostates with death if they do not re-convert. The convert community is estimated at 2,000 or more and is reportedly growing amidst the insecurity of war.

Examples:

- ▶ For security reasons only the following details can be published: Private worship has become particularly risky for Christians in areas controlled by radical Muslims or areas that were 'liberated' by Sunni forces supported by Saudi Arabia and its Western allies. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and IS operate freely in large parts of the country. Fear for and actual pressure from family have caused a handful of isolated Yemeni converts to flee the country. However, Yemenis who are practicing their Christian faith in fellowship with other local believers remain.
- ▶ The whereabouts of Father Tom Uzhunnalil, who was abducted during the attack on a care home for elderly and disabled in Aden in March 2016, remain unknown although reports from 14 July 2017 confirm that he is still alive.



Where persecution comes from

In contrast to the neighbouring Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, the main threat for Christians comes from the government in Iran. The Iranian regime defines Iran as an Islamic State based on Shia Islam and they actively try to expand the influence of Shia Islam. Christians and other minorities are seen as a serious threat. Although some reports mention pressure from families and communities on converts from Islam to Christianity, Iranian society is much less fanatic than their leadership due to the spread of the less conservative Sufi Islam and the pride of the Iranian pre-Islamic Persian culture.

How Christians are suffering

The Iranian leadership are very much anti-Christian and are creating severe problems for all Christian groups within Iran, but especially for communities of converts from Islam. The government presents the historical communities of Armenian and Assyrian Christians as the 'true and traditional Christianity', but this is just window-dressing in order to be able to declare other Christians, especially converts, as not being real Christians. The historical communities are allowed to preach to fellow countrymen in their own language, but it is forbidden to minister to people with a Muslim background (speaking Persian) or have them attend church services. Although formally recognized and protected by law, they are treated as second-class citizens and have reported imprisonment, physical abuse, harassment and discrimination when reaching out to Muslims. Converts from Islam to Christianity constitute probably the biggest group. They bear the brunt of persecution, especially by the government. The government sees them as an attempt by Western countries to undermine Islam and the Islamic regime of Iran. Baptism is seen as a public declaration of one's conversion and therefore forbidden. Leaders of Christian convert groups have been arrested, prosecuted and have received long prison sentences for 'crimes against the national security'; since 2014 an increasing number of non-leaders have also received similar punishment. Due to such high pressure, converts have to be very careful and many of them practice their faith isolated from other Christians. There is also a growing community of Iranian Christian converts worldwide, as many converts have fled the country over the years and other Iranians became Christians abroad.

Examples:

- ▶ Over the WWL 2018 reporting period, there were at least 52 arrests. Many Christians (especially converts) have been prosecuted and sentenced to long terms in jail. Their families face public humiliation during this time.
- ▶ Several house-churches were raided and stopped functioning in the WWL 2018 reporting period and Christian leaders from non-convert communities are sometimes forced to report to the government about the members of their congregations.

Leader:
President Ram Nath Kovind

Population:
1.3 billion (63.9 million Christians)

Main religion:
Hinduism

Government:
Federal republic

Source of persecution:
Religious nationalism

Ranking History:
WWL 2017 Position: 15, WWL 2016 Position: 17



Where persecution comes from

The increasing influence of intolerant Hindu radicalism poses huge problems for Christians as the violence of local radical Hindu groups (e.g. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Shiv Sena and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)), or of angry mobs of villagers (instigated by Hindu clergy) who attack Christians is not stopped by the authorities. These local, state and national authorities are often dominated by the radical Hindu party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This means the Hindu radicals can act with increasing impunity.

How Christians are suffering

All Christians are experiencing persecution in India since Hindu radicals view them as alien to the nation. They want to cleanse their country from Islam and Christianity and do not shy away from using extensive violence to achieve this. Converts to Christianity – here from a Hindu background - bear the brunt of the persecution in India and are constantly under pressure to return to Hinduism (especially via campaigns known as Ghar Wapsi/“home-coming”). They are often physically assaulted and sometimes killed. Radical Hindu attackers are increasingly enjoying impunity when they harass Muslims or Christians. As a result, the level of fear and uncertainty among the majority of Christians in India is increasing. The fact that the government is looking away when religious minorities are attacked is likely to cause an increase in violence in the coming years.

Examples

- ▶ On 15 July 2017 Pastor Sultan Masih was shot and killed in a drive-by shooting outside of his church in Ludhiana, Punjab. (Source: International Christian Concern1)
- ▶ On 15 March 2017 US-based Christian charity “Compassion International” ended its activities in India after 48 years because of increasing governmental restrictions. The Ministry of Home Affairs accused the charity of funding Indian partners that were not registered to receive foreign funds. Ever since the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in 2014, Hindu groups have accused Christian charities of using their activities to convert Hindus. (Source: UCAN2)
- ▶ On 10 May 2017 the police arrested six pastors at the house of a Christian in the village of Salempur (Uttar Pradesh) where they had gathered with approximately 250 Christians for a healing prayer service. The pastors belong to a non-traditional church and were charged with disturbance of the peace, creating hostility between religions and attempting to incite a riot. (Source: UCAN3)

Leader:
King Salman bin Abdulaziz

Population:
32.7 million (1.4 million Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Monarchy

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism

Ranking History:
WWL 2017 Position: 14, WWL 2016 Position: 14



Where persecution comes from

Generally speaking, anti-Christian feelings (and feelings against anything perceived as non-Muslim) are common among Saudi citizens. Converts from Islam to Christianity mostly suffer pressure from their extended family, which can even include death threats. Government officials create and maintain a strict Islamic system that treats Christians as second class people and denies places of worship to any other religion than Islam. Islamic leaders also try imposing strict Islamic law on all people who come to Saudi Arabia, including Christians. These laws are most often a problem to converts who are still considered to be Muslims.

How Christians are suffering

Most Christians in Saudi Arabia are expatriates or migrants who are living and working temporarily in the country. The majority of expatriate Christians come from low and middle income countries, such as India, the Philippines and Africa, but there are also some from the Western world. Besides being exploited and poorly paid, Asian and African migrant workers are regularly exposed to verbal and physical abuse because of their ethnicity and low status, but their Christian faith can also play a role in this. Expatriate Christians are severely restricted in sharing their Christian faith with Muslims and in gathering for worship, which entails the risk of detention and deportation. The few Saudi Christians from a Muslim background face even more pressure. Nevertheless, the small number of Saudi Christians has been increasing and they are also becoming bolder, sharing their Christian faith with others on the Internet and Christian satellite TV channels. This public sharing has often led to serious repercussions either from family or authorities.

Examples

- ▶ Many converts are under strong pressure from their families and are fearful of their violent reaction if their new faith would become known. Converts run a high risk of being sentenced to death for apostasy, however as far as is known there were none officially executed for this reason in recent years. Nevertheless, the risk of extra-judicial killings cannot be excluded in an attempt to save the honor of the family.
- ▶ Several expatriate Christians were arrested and briefly detained in a small number of raids on fellowship meetings. Some local believers were arrested and falsely accused of having links with extremist groups. Three house churches were reportedly closed, some after being raided by the police.
- ▶ Christians both Saudis and foreigners risk imprisonment, physical abuse and serious threats because of their faith. Several were forced to leave the country because of their faith
- ▶ Rape and sexual harassment remain a huge problem and Christians working as housemaids in Saudi homes are particularly vulnerable.

Leader:
President Abdulla Yameen

Population:
376,000 (A few thousand Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Islamic republic

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism

Ranking History:
WWL 2017 Position: 13, WWL 2016 Position: 13



Where persecution comes from:

The government of the Maldives insists that the country has to be run according to conservative Islamic tenets and that all citizens have to be Muslims. Therefore religious freedom does not exist, except for expatriate Christians who are only allowed to practice their faith in the utmost privacy behind closed doors – a strictly monitored activity. Reportedly, most have ceased meeting, since it was drawing too much attention from the authorities. Additionally, the government is currently bogged down in a political struggle with opposition forces and therefore cracks down on any perceived threat quickly and harshly. Radical Islamic preachers and clerics, whether native or coming from the Middle East, are exerting strong socio-religious control and are influencing others with their radical views of Islam, making it impossible for Christians (especially converts) to show anything of their Christian faith due to fear of being monitored and handed over to the government authorities.

How Christians are suffering:

Though small in population, the Maldives consists of 1,700 small islands, but has one of the highest population densities worldwide, especially on its main island, Malé. The population thus forms close-knit, homogeneous island communities which serve as natural watchdogs for any deviation of its members, which naturally includes religious choice. Conversion to Christianity can thus easily result in being reported to Muslim leaders or authorities. Expatriate Christians, most of them working in the tourist sector and coming from India and Sri Lanka, are closely watched as well, making Christian fellowship very difficult.

Examples:

- ▶ Due to security issues and the very small Christian community living in the Maldives, hardly any examples can be given. Incidents of confiscating a Bible upon arrival as well as the detention and deportation of Christians can be mentioned as occurring in the WWL 2018 reporting period.
- ▶ In a country where according to Article 9 (d) of the Constitution non-Muslims may not become a citizen of the Maldives and accordingly, if someone is found to have converted to Christianity, will be stripped of his or her citizenship as well punished for violating Sharia law, it is not hard to imagine that pressure is extremely high and converts remain well hidden.
- ▶ Some Maldivian Christians have preferred to leave the islands and stay abroad due to the enormous pressure they were put under.

Leader:
President Muhammadu Buhari

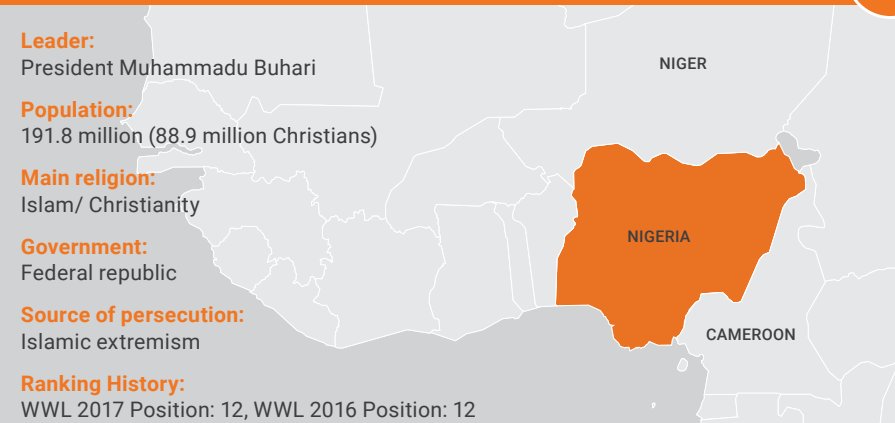
Population:
191.8 million (88.9 million Christians)

Main religion:
Islam/ Christianity

Government:
Federal republic

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism

Ranking History:
WWL 2017 Position: 12, WWL 2016 Position: 12



Where persecution comes from

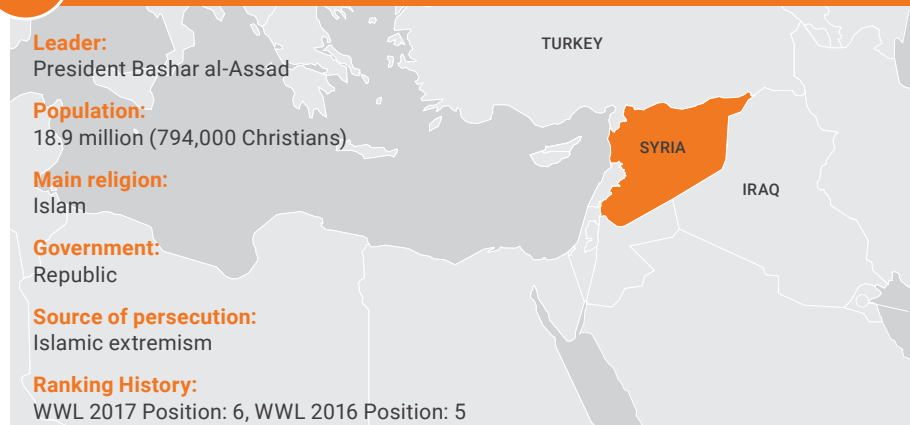
Hostility towards Christians is often spread by radical Islamic teaching and practice. This is reinforced by the fact that Islam is the dominant religion in the northern part of Nigeria while Christianity is dominant in the south. The rivalry between ethnic groups in the south and the north often has a spillover effect contributing to the persecution of Christians. Radical armed groups such as Boko Haram and Fulani Muslim herdsmen have been particularly active in the persecution of Christians in northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt region. The violence in the Middle Belt area indicates that the violent persecution of Christians in the country is spreading southwards. Further, there is corruption at all levels of government, and criminal groups (often organized along ethnic lines) are engaged in human and drug-trafficking. Both occasionally give rise to the persecution of Christians.

How Christians are suffering

Most Christians in the southern part of the country live in an environment in which their religious freedom is respected. However, Christians in the north and in the Middle Belt suffer from violence perpetrated by militant Islamic groups. Such violence often results in the loss of life, physical injury as well as loss of property. As a result of the violence, Christians are also dispossessed of their land and means of livelihood. Christians in northern Nigeria, especially in the Sharia states, face discrimination and exclusion as second class citizens. Christians with a Muslim background also face rejection from their own families and pressure to give up Christianity. Corruption has enfeebled the state and has made it ill equipped to protect Christians from the violence perpetrated by groups like Boko Haram.

Examples

- ▶ On 13 November 2016, raids conducted by suspected Fulani Muslim herdsmen on five villages predominantly inhabited by Christians in southern Kaduna State (Middle Belt) resulted in the death of 45 people.
- ▶ A raid conducted on five villages that are predominantly inhabited by Christians has resulted in the death of 45 people the Kauru Local Government Area, in the Middle Belt state of Kaduna.² The attack occurred in November 2016 and is believed to have been carried out by Fulani Muslim herdsmen. Those who perpetrated the attack also burned down more than one hundred houses including eight house-churches.
- ▶ In another attack staged by armed men who are suspected of being Fulani Muslim herdsmen, 20 Christian Nigerians were killed in the village of Ancha Bassa in Plateau State on 7 September 2017. On 20 July 2017, a church in the city of Onitsha in southern Nigeria was attacked by gunmen killing 12 and injuring 18.



Where persecution comes from:

For all types of Christianity, Islamic militant groups are a clear threat. The extended family is the main source of persecution for converts from Islam. Government authorities are known to restrict the activities of evangelical Christians and converts to prevent instability. This move is sometimes instigated by the converts' family or even historical churches. Hate speech against Christians by Islamic leaders occurs but is not allowed in government controlled areas. Muslim religious leaders are also known to have put pressure on converts, directly or indirectly by their families or security agencies.

How Christians are suffering:

Due to their public exposure, especially the leaders of historical churches are targeted for abduction. But Baptist, Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations are also in a vulnerable position as they are known for their Western orientation, fragmentation, lack of strong leadership and lack of a foreign spokesperson (e.g. like a Pope or bishop) who can speak on their behalf. In areas controlled by radical Islamic groups most historic churches are either demolished or used as Islamic centers. Public expressions of Christian faith are prohibited and church buildings or monasteries cannot be repaired or restored irrespective of whether the damage was collateral or intentional. In government controlled areas, there is less monitoring of Christians due to the circumstances of war. The political reputation of denominations, churches and local church leaders plays an important role in the level of persecution or oppression they face from groups that are fighting President Assad.

Examples:

- ▶ Christians from a Muslim background are especially put under pressure by their family, as their conversion brings great dishonor to them. This is particular true in majority Sunni areas, where converts risk being expelled from their family homes or worse. Pressure from the family is somewhat less intense in Kurdish areas, as the Kurdish Sunnis are generally less radical. Indeed, in the North Aleppo Governorate there are recognized Kurdish Christian communities.
- ▶ A Christian leader with a Druze background has been interrogated by the security services and is being monitored. Many are coming to faith through him. Although there has been no direct threat against his life, some converts in his church are being threatened by their extended families.
- ▶ A female Christian with a Druze background from the southern Syrian province of Sweida is currently hiding in Lebanon. When she converted her young daughter was taken away from her and her family threatened to kill her.



Where persecution comes from

There are two main sources of persecution of Christians in Uzbekistan - the State and the Muslim environment. State persecution comes in the form of police, secret services and mahalla (local authorities) monitoring religious activities by various means (bugging homes, tapping phones, infiltrating groups etc.) and attending church services. State authorities regularly raid non-registered churches. The general Islamic culture makes life for converts to Christianity particularly difficult.

How Christians are suffering

All Christian communities are experiencing some form of persecution. Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Uzbek population. It is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background who are bearing the brunt of persecution both at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community. Where churches have not been registered, Christians suffer repeatedly from police raids, threats, arrests and fines. President Islam Karimov died on 2 September 2016 and was succeeded by the hardliner Shavkat Mirziyayev. For Christians, nothing has changed: Raids on house church groups, confiscation of religious materials, interrogation and detention of believers continue. Christians with a Muslim background continue to experience pressure and violence from family, friends and local community.

Examples

- ▶ The Uzbek government has a special department for monitoring religious activity and censoring religious literature.
- ▶ It is difficult to register new churches and the registration rules for already existing religious communities have become more difficult.
- ▶ On 24 March 2017 state officials raided a flat in Tashkent where five Protestant women were meeting to discuss the Christian faith. Books, computer and camera were confiscated. The group leader was fined five times the minimum monthly wage by a District Criminal Court in April 2017 for "carrying out an unauthorized religious activity". According to local sources, one of the women present may have been an informer for the authorities. (Source: Forum 18)



Where persecution comes from:

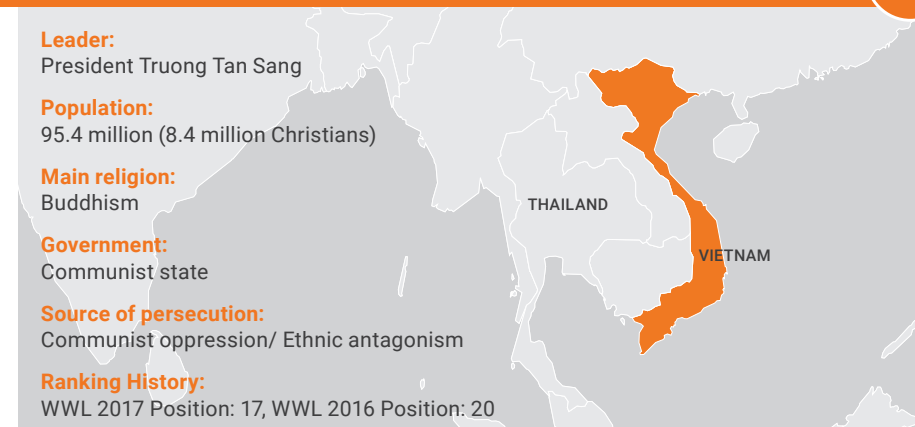
Prejudice and bias against Christians in Egypt has a long history and Christians in the country had been treated as second class citizens since Islam came to the region. This societal exclusion and marginalization has become even worse since fanatical Islamist groups became active in the country especially in the 20th century. The influence of such groups has exacerbated the everyday persecution that targets Christians in their village and neighborhoods and workplace. Since Islamist President Mohammed Morsi was ousted by the army in July 2013, fanatical Islamist groups have become even more violent in their attacks against Christians. IS in particular in Egypt has vowed to wage war against Christians and staged several violent attacks against Christians. Besides fanatical Islamist groups, the low regard that the Egyptian state has for fundamental rights including freedom of religion and corruption in the country also contributes to the persecution of Christians.

How Christians are suffering:

Egyptian Christians suffer from persecution in various ways. Christians with a Muslim background have great difficulties in living out their faith since they face enormous pressure from their immediate and extended family to return to Islam and the State also makes it nearly impossible to get official recognition of their conversion. Christians in general have problems finding a place to worship. The difficulties come both from state regulatory and administrative restrictions as well as from communal hostility and violence that occasionally targets Christian places of worship. Christians also face discrimination and abuse, especially Christian women, in their places of work and when they go about their daily life in public spaces. The teaching by fanatic imams that incites hostility and violence against Christians also adds to the suffering of Christians since it often depicts them in very negative terms and causes physiological trauma especially among children. Furthermore, over the past year, several violent and deadly attacks that targeted Christians have caused the death and injury of several Christians.

Examples:

- ▶ July 2017, an Egyptian Christian soldier was been beaten to death at the Al-Salaam Special Forces unit. Reports indicate that he was killed because he failed to comply with the order of his captain to remove tattoos of a cross and Christians saints.
- ▶ May 2017, 30 Christians (or 35 according to some reports) were killed and 28 wounded by gunmen while they were traveling to a monastery.³ The gunmen tried to force their victims to convert to Islam before they opened fire.
- ▶ 45 people died and 100 people were injured as a result of two suicide bomb attacks against churches in the cities of Tanta and Alexandria on 9 April 2017 (Palm Sunday). The Islamic State group claimed responsibility.



Where persecution comes from

The government from national to local level persecutes the Christian minority by the laws they pass and on how these laws are being implemented and misinterpreted at the grassroots level. Ethnic group leaders in their pursuit of maintaining the tribe's culture also exclude Christians and see them as traitors of their culture and identity. Villagers also persecute Christians conniving with one another or with local authorities in beating believers, kicking them out of their village, or disrupting Christian meetings by stoning their place of worship. Non-Christian relatives of Christians are also strong persecutors cutting family ties and denying inheritance; in some cases forcing a Christian spouse to divorce; and withholding the right of custody of the Christian parent to his/her children.

How Christians are suffering

Historical Christian communities like Roman Catholics, who make up the vast majority of Christians in Vietnam, generally have more space to move, aside from being monitored. However, if Catholics get active politically, fx. as bloggers or activists against environmental pollution or something similar, they are targeted by the authorities and can get arrested and sentenced. In several cities and provinces, the Catholic congregations own large plots of land, which state authorities often grab for development and monetary purposes. Protests against this practice are quashed. Converts from folk religion and non-traditional Protestants are persecuted more intensively, especially if they are based in the rural areas of Central and Northern Vietnam. Most belong to ethnic minorities, like the Hmong, and are facing all forms of persecution, from social exclusion, harassment and discrimination to violent attacks, leaving their homes destroyed and being chased from their villages. In many cases, the local Communist authorities are not directly involved, but hire thugs to act against Christians. In several cases, Christians fled abroad and claimed asylum.

Examples

- ▶ Ethnic minority Christian children are discriminated against in schools and do not get the same attention as others; also their medical needs are often neglected. Some are not even allowed to attend school because of their Christian faith.
- ▶ The continuing saga of Montagnard Christian refugees who left central Vietnamese provinces because of persecution and fled to Cambodia took a new turn in the WWL 2018 reporting period. While more than 100 refugees have been repatriated, it was reported in April 2017 that since March 2017, 50 Montagnards fled from Cambodia to Thailand, illustrating just how strongly they seek to avoid persecution in Vietnam.
- ▶ June 2017, vandals attacked a Catholic church building again, whose congregation is known for its outspoken criticism of the government's handling of a devastating toxic waste spill. In the first six months of 2017, Vietnam jailed several Catholic activists and bloggers and Protestant pastors.



Where persecution comes from

There are two main sources of persecution for Christians in Turkmenistan, the State and the Muslim environment. State persecution comes in the form of police, secret services and local authorities monitoring religious activities and regularly attending church services. State authorities often raid non-registered churches. The general Islamic culture makes life for converts to Christianity particularly difficult.

How Christians are suffering

Even Russian Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches may experience Sunday services being monitored. The printing or importing of Christian materials is restricted. Christians from a Muslim background bear the brunt of the persecution both at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community. Where churches have not been registered, Christians suffer repeatedly from police raids, threats, arrests and fines. After Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan is the most repressive Central Asian state for religious minorities. Given the increased nationalism and the "spiritual guidance" the new president is supposed to be giving the country (like his predecessor Niyazov with his Rukhnama teachings), the pressure on Christians will most likely remain at a very high level but with very low levels of violence.

Examples

- ▶ On 12 April 2016 a new law on religion was introduced in Turkmenistan which places tighter control on Christian church life.
- ▶ Families of converts, the local Muslim community, and the authorities interfere with and often hinder church activities.
- ▶ Beatings occur every time police interrogate Christians. Arrested Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses receive similar severe treatment.



Where persecution comes from

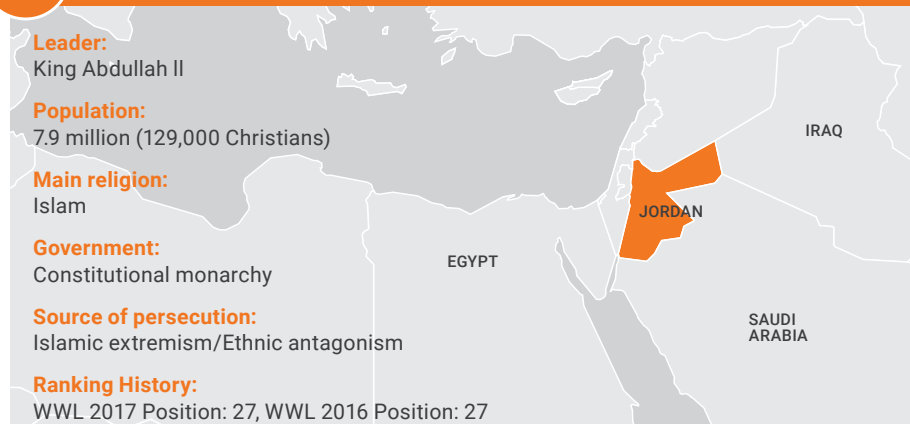
Christians are regularly persecuted by (Communist) government authorities - most often at the provincial level - and by local members of the Communist Party. There are occasions where the authorities cooperate with local religious leaders (mostly Buddhist monks) in order to put pressure on Christians, especially converts. Converts to Christianity experience persecution in their own family on a very frequent basis. There have also been efforts to monitor the activities of house-churches with the help of certain registered churches. Normal citizens, especially in rural areas, watch Christians with suspicion and even drive them out of the village on occasions.

How Christians are suffering

The Communist authorities heavily monitor all religious activities and control them, including those of the registered church. As all gatherings have to be notified to the administration, house churches have to operate clandestinely as they are considered "illegal gatherings". Converts to Christianity bear the brunt of persecution. They are considered as putting themselves outside the (Buddhist-animist) community and are consequently persecuted by their own (extended, as a Laotian household usually is composed of three generations being under one roof) family and by local authorities, often stirring up the community or using local religious leaders.

Examples

- ▶ In August 2016, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith issued a new regulation: Decree 315 on the Management and Protection of Religious Activities. Decree 315 defines the Government's role as the final arbiter of permissible religious activities. Decree 315 replaces Decree 92 on religious practice. The government issued an update in the WWL 2018 reporting period which will bring even more restrictions and trouble for Christians. As a direct result of this update, Christians in Luang Prabang Province have received more pressure from police to stop holding meetings. The new law requires a registered place of worship that is owned by the church and a registered minister in order to be considered legal. However, this is almost impossible to accomplish. First, nobody is keen to sell land to a church. Secondly, the new law states that the construction of churches needs to be approved by the prime minister.
- ▶ There have been several cases where Christians endured expulsions from their communities in the WWL 2018 reporting period. Reports that there have been churches of the Hmong minority destroyed could not be confirmed and were therefore not considered in the scoring. One house of a Christian believer was targeted by an arson attack in January 2017. At least two Laotian Christians were detained for several days by the police in Xaisomboun Province in March 2017. And there were reports of more Hmong Christians being detained and arrested.



Where persecution comes from

Converts from Islam to Christianity experience most persecution, followed by Christians who are involved in ministry to converts or active in evangelization or reaching out. Government officials were reported to put pressure on converts to return to Islam and sometimes they had been initially informed by the convert's family. Most pressure comes from the family, which can even include serious violence and killing. Tribalism is strong in Jordan and ethnic group leaders are also likely to influence converts to renounce their new faith. The same is true for Islamic leaders and 'normal citizens', who consider converts still to be Muslims. Government officials are reported to monitor the churches and ministries of Christians active in evangelization and put them under pressure to stop these activities. There is some pressure from leaders of Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches where the official recognition of new (mainly non-traditional Protestant) churches is concerned. There is fear that any form of evangelization will result in a backlash affecting all Christians.

How Christians are suffering

Most Christians in Jordan belong to the Orthodox and Roman Catholic denominations. Overall, they enjoy a relatively high level of religious freedom but can experience discrimination, e.g. in the area of employment and restrictions against the public proclamation of the Gospel. Christians with a Muslim background are persecuted the most for their faith, but their small numbers have been growing. Their situation has worsened during the past few years and any open testimony of their new faith leads to serious consequences, including beatings, arrest and killing. Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal congregations also face much opposition and any Christians active in evangelism and/or helping converts can face threats and obstruction in daily life. These churches are not recognized by the Jordanian government, which in some cases has led to violence against Christians being met with impunity.

Examples

- ▶ In 2017 there were three incidents of either church attacks or church closures. In general, acts of vandalism against churches are not uncommon in Jordan. There were several cases of attacks on houses of Christians with a Muslim background and other Christians during the WWL2018 reporting period.
- ▶ A small number of Christians with a Muslim background were reportedly arrested for reasons directly or indirectly related to their faith. Some converts were allegedly physically abused or suffered death threats from family members.
- ▶ It was reported that a number of converts had left their houses and were forced into hiding or seeking another place to live either inside or outside the country. Several foreign missionaries were forced to leave the country because of their Christian activities.



Where persecution comes from

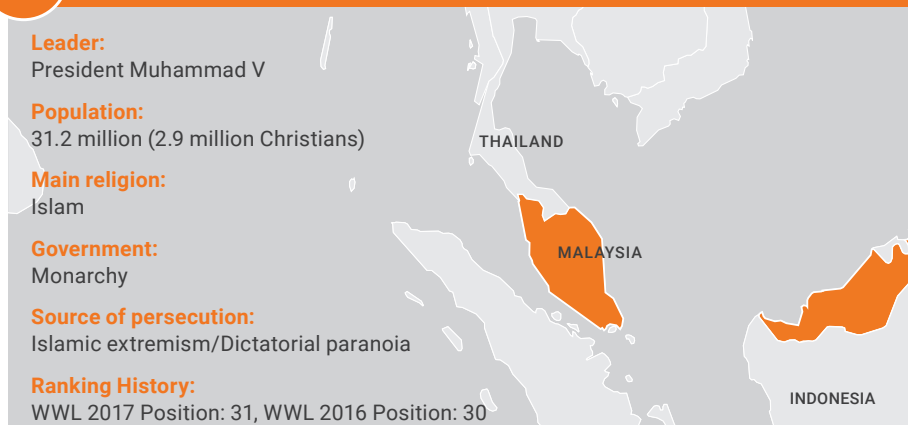
Most of the persecution of Christians in Tajikistan comes from government officials at various levels – ranging from the country's central government that imposes restrictive legislation to local authorities and police who raid religious meetings, detain believers and confiscate religious materials. Another source of persecution comes from the Muslim environment (family, friends, community and local imams) that object to Christians evangelizing among Muslims.

How Christians are suffering

All Christian communities are experiencing some form of persecution. Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Tajik population. It is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background who are bearing the brunt of persecution both at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community. The government puts heavy pressure on all "deviating" groups, including Christians. By tightening already existing laws and by enforcing them strictly, the government is putting additional pressure on the Christian minority. The youth law in particular has left Christians (and other affected religious minorities) in legal limbo as it is not obvious what is allowed and what is denied by law. In recent months the government has become much more like other repressive Central Asian governments – therefore, the situation for Christians is expected to worsen in the future. The pressure from the social environment (mostly on converts) will remain stable.

Examples

- ▶ In February 2017 the authorities began a series of raids on congregations belonging to the Sunmin Sunbogym (Good News of Grace) Protestant Church in the northern Sogd region, confiscating Christian songbooks and other literature. (Source: Forum 18)
- ▶ On 10 April 2017 the secret police arrested Pastor Bakhrom Kholmatov of the Sunmin Sunbogym congregation in the regional capital Khujand. He remains in secret police custody, apparently under investigation on criminal charges of "extremism". (Source: Forum 18)
- ▶ In 2017, officials in Dushanbe closed down two nursery schools. One was closed after officials found a Christian songbook, the other apparently because Protestants were employed there. (Source: Forum 18)



Where persecution comes from

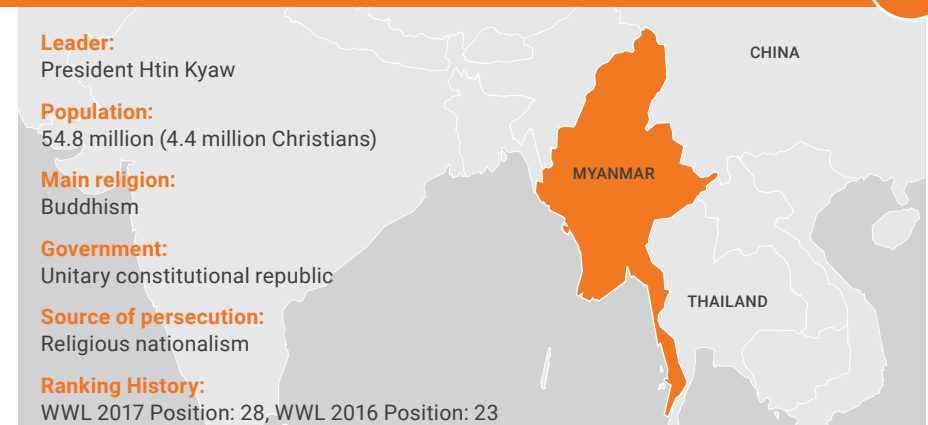
The constitution prohibits Malays from converting to other religions and limits the propagation of non-Muslim religions. Political parties like the ruling UMNO and opposition PAS uphold and protect Islam, and government officials therefore strive to maintain or increase the Islamic influence on society to the detriment of non-Muslim minorities, e.g. by running Islamization strategies. Various Muslim NGOs see themselves as “champions of Islam” and have the support of the government. Their statements and actions often serve to stir up racial disharmony and religious discrimination. For Christians with a Muslim background, family members are the strongest drivers of persecution.

How Christians are suffering

Converts are the group experiencing strongest persecution as every ethnic Malay is perceived to be Muslim. Whoever deviates from this is not just going against the constitution, but also against society at large and of course, against family and neighborhood. Indeed, Roman Catholics and Methodists are watched by both the authorities and NGOs, but the stronger focus is on non-traditional Protestant groups as these tend to be more active in testifying about their faith. The Malay population benefit from the government’s ‘affirmative action policy’ with the effect that non-Malay (and with them the majority of Christians) are virtually treated as second class citizens. These include the large group of indigenous (“Bumiputra”) Christians. The head of the PAS political party, who proposed the introduction of Islamic penal code (hudud) in the northeastern state of Kelantan, openly slandered Christians by claiming that they are converting Muslims by using money as an incentive. Such comments sow discord and hatred towards Christians.

Examples

- ▶ Christian that has converted from Islam is usually either reported to the Islamic authorities or simply expelled from the community. Christian converts are excluded from the hereditary order and claiming custody is a big problem for non-Muslim spouses. For Christians from a Hindu or Buddhist background, the pressure is more from the families.
- ▶ All children in state-run nursery and primary schools are required to attend Islamic education. In state schools, only Muslim pupils (including Christians with a Muslim background) are required to attend Islamic classes. At university level, there is a compulsory subject for all called “Islamic and Asian Civilization” which is considered an instrument for furthering Islamization.
- ▶ February 2017, Pastor Raymond Koh was abducted in broad daylight by unknown assailants. According to media reports, this abduction could be linked to allegations that he was active in the conversion of Muslims. However, these claims had already been investigated and dropped due to lack of evidence. Another Malay Pastor, Pastor Joshua Hilmy and his wife Ruth, also has been missing since November 2016.



Where persecution comes from

Buddhist leaders (monks) stir up communities to persecute Christians in predominantly Buddhist communities. The radical Buddhist movements Ma Ba Tha and 969 continue to “protect” Buddhism as the country’s national religion. The recent ban of these radical movements did not change anything as they found other ways to continue. Strong Buddhist, Muslim and tribal families do persecute family members who convert to Christianity as conversion is seen as family and community betrayal. Local government officials, especially from rural areas, are often biased towards Buddhist leaders. This means that minorities like Christians, who in many cases happen to be both a religious and an ethnic minority, are disadvantaged and have no way of seeking justice. These Christians additionally suffer from the brutal and almost forgotten long-term war the Burmese army is fighting against insurgency groups.

How Christians are suffering

In predominantly Christian states like Kachin State, Karen State or in Northern Shan, even well-established historical churches are being attacked. More than 100,000 Christians live in IDP camps and are deprived of access to food and healthcare. In some instances, Buddhist monks invade the properties of a church and build Buddhist shrines within the church premise. Converts are persecuted by their Buddhist, Muslim or tribal families and communities because they have left their former belief and have thereby removed themselves from community life. Communities who aim to stay “Buddhist only” make life for Christian families impossible by not allowing them to use community water resources. Non-traditional church groups experience opposition too, especially when they are located in the rural areas of Myanmar and/or are known for proselytizing.

Examples

- ▶ Converts are discriminated against in various ways. In one report, a teacher refused to give a Christian student a list of questions provided to others in preparation for tests. In another case, when a family sold a plot of land, the earnings were distributed to all siblings of the family except the convert.
- ▶ May 2017, three Christians collecting firewood in Kachin State were stopped by the army and taken into custody. Their dead bodies were found on 28 May and it can be safely assumed that they were tortured and killed by the army.
- ▶ The Burmese army destroyed a Catholic church in Mung Koe in a bombardment aimed at ethnic rebel militias in Shan State on 3 December 2016.
- ▶ Two Baptists, Langjaw Gam Seng and Dumdaw Nawng Lat, were arrested by the army in January 2017, when they showed a journalist a Catholic church that had been bombed. They were sentenced to over four and two years’ imprisonment respectively on 29 October 2017.



Where persecution comes from

Christians experience persecution from radical Hindus in various ways: Local and national authorities impose legal and other restrictions; local Hindu priests and Hindu radical movements carry out physical attacks against Christians; the local community often forms a hostile environment at the village level.

How Christians are suffering

All Christian communities in Nepal are experiencing some form of persecution, but at varying levels of intensity. Roman Catholic churches and churches where foreigners gather experience the least problems. Converts from Hinduism are put under most pressure as they are viewed as deviating from the faith of the ancestors. Converts and Protestant churches are particularly under pressure from family, friends, community and local authorities. From time to time Hindu radicals take advantage of the ongoing political instability by attacking Christians. Most of the time they get away with impunity.

There are also some legal restrictions at the national level. The 2015 Constitution declares that Nepal is a secular state, however it also clearly specifies that conversion to any religion other than Hinduism is not permissible and is in fact a punishable offence.

Examples

- ▶ Christians in Nepal continue to struggle to obtain rights for a burial ground where they can legally bury their dead. Because of the lack of official burial grounds, Christians are often forced to bury their dead in forests illegally. At times, local Hindu radicals, enraged by the Christian burials, dig up the bodies and bring them back to the homes of the Christian families or even leave the bodies in the streets. Again, the Christian community is petitioning the government to allot them land to officially bury their dead, but the issue remains unresolved. (Source: International Christian Concern)
- ▶ On 18 April 2017 "unknown persons" attempted to set the Catholic Cathedral in Kathmandu on fire. The fire damaged the priest's residence and the western part of the church. A car and two motorbikes were also completely burnt. No casualties were reported. (Source: UCAN2)
- ▶ Seven people, including proprietors of two private schools, were arrested on 9 June 2016 in Dolakha district, Nepal, accused of converting others to Christianity because they were distributing Bible handbooks to children. A few days later, on 14 June 2016, the authorities also took into custody Rev Shakti Pakhrin for his ties with the people already under investigation for proselytizing. They were all acquitted in December 2016. (Source: Christian Solidarity Worldwide3).



Where persecution comes from

Policies that favour Muslims over other religions are legally executed and enforced by all government officers in all sectors of the country. Muslim and ethnic group leaders are able to put pressure on the Christian minority by exercising their significant influence on the sultan, who is considered the protector and defender of the Malay race and Islam. Family members and neighbours can easily bring converts and churches into trouble by simply reporting them to the official security department. The authorities monitor and place restrictions on all churches including registered ones.

How Christians are suffering

Converts from Islam suffer persecution as conversion is considered illegal and everything will be done to bring them back to their original faith. Non-traditional Christian communities cannot be registered as churches, but have to be registered as companies, societies, or family centres'. As such, they are treated as secular organizations and are required to submit their financial and operational reports to the government every year. The whole of society Christians included is affected by the continuing introduction of Sharia laws as well as by the tightening economic situation, which prevents the authorities from being so generous with pay-outs to quell dissatisfaction.

Examples

- ▶ As conversion from Islam is strictly opposed by Bruneian laws, converts to Christianity will be separated from their spouse and children and their spouse will be forced to divorce their partner. If converts are identified as such by the security department, they are threatened to make them recant their faith.
- ▶ Some Christians and members of other minority groups are not allowed official citizenship. This leads to a large group of stateless residents who are disadvantaged in many aspects.
- ▶ Especially young people are leaving the country as they lack perspectives for the future. This affects churches as well. Potential next generation leadership is becoming scarce.



Where persecution comes from:

Christians experience persecution at all levels of society: The government, the local community and even one's family can be dangerous for Christians, especially for converts from Islam to Christianity. No other religion than Islam is seen as an acceptable faith and Sharia law prescribes a wide range of rules for personal, family and community life. Qatar's society is bound by conservative Islamic norms, enforced by ordinary citizens and the government. The state religion is strictly conservative Wahhabi Islam.

How Christians are suffering:

There are two groups of Christians in Qatar, which are strictly separated from each other. Expatriate communities consisting of Christian migrant workers are the biggest group. The government only allows them to worship in public at a designated place outside the capital Doha. Proselytizing Muslims is strictly forbidden and can lead to prosecution and banishment from the country. Many of those migrant workers have to live and work in poor conditions, while their Christianity adds to their vulnerability. Despite their living conditions, these Christian communities are growing. The other group consists of converts from Islam to Christianity. Both converts from an indigenous and migrant background bear the most of the persecution. Many indigenous Christians converted outside the country. They face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. Converts from a migrant background face high pressure and are controlled by their social environment in the labour camps they live in. Even their employers can be a source of persecution. Both indigenous and migrant converts risk discrimination, harassment, police monitoring and all sorts of intimidation by vigilante groups. Moreover, a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters. Despite this, there are hardly ever reports of Christians being killed, imprisoned or harmed for their faith.

Examples:

- ▶ World Watch Monitor reported in February 2017 about the harsh conditions for Christian migrant workers in Qatar. In 2022, Qatar wants to host the FIFA World Cup. The country seems determined to make a good impression – to look like a modern, glamorous, successful country that is welcoming to everyone who is willing to spend money and have a good time. This cannot hide however the other side of Qatar - a profoundly intolerant country for non-Muslims with a deep division between the extremely rich Qatari nationals and the hundreds of thousands of often exploited labourers, mostly from Asian countries.



Where persecution comes from:

There are two main sources for the persecution of Christians in Kazakhstan: One is the State and the other the Muslim environment. State persecution comes in the form of police, secret services and local authorities who monitor religious activities and often attend church services. State authorities regularly raid non-registered churches. The general Islamic culture makes life for converts to Christianity particularly difficult.

How Christians are suffering:

All Christian communities are experiencing some form of persecution. Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Kazakh population. It is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background who are bearing most of the persecution both at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community. Religious freedom is already restricted by legislation (dating from September 2011) and the Kazakhstan government is constantly working at increasing its control over the entire society, which will mean more surveillance, raids of meetings, and detention of believers. It is using the threat of militant Islam to restrict more and more areas of freedom. This all accounts for a worsening situation for the Christian minority and makes the future outlook for them look worrying. Pressure from the social environment (mostly on converts from Islam) is unlikely to change.

Examples:

- ▶ On 13 September 2016, two Baptists from Taldykorgan, Mikhail Lozovoi and Nadezhda Pikalina, were fined for offering uncensored religious literature to others in June 2016 on a visit to a village in East Kazakhstan Region. Their appeals against the fines were officially rejected in October and November 2016. (Source: Forum 18)
- ▶ Police who raided a Baptist Sunday morning meeting for worship on 28 May 2017 in the southern city of Taraz took 20 of the men and one of the women present to the local police station. There they took their fingerprints, photographed them and recorded their home addresses and other personal data. Police issued summary fines with no court hearing to eight of those present. (Source: Forum 18)
- ▶ Seventh-day Adventist Yklas Kabduakasov remained throughout the WWL 2018 reporting period in a labour camp after being sentenced to two years hard labour in December 2015. He was originally arrested for discussing his faith with students recruited by the secret police. (Source: Forum 18)



Where persecution comes from

In Ethiopia the situation is often complex for Christians with different types of persecution overlapping at times:

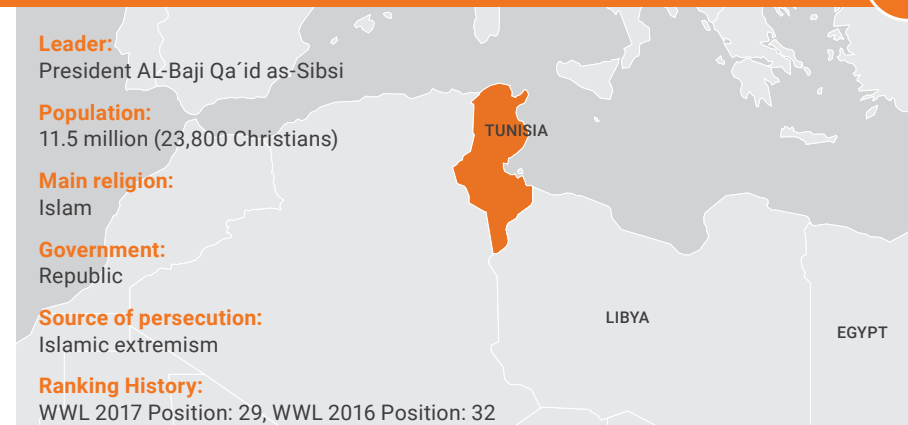
- 1) Government regulations are restricting the freedom of religion.
- 2) In some parts of the country conservative Muslims are posing challenges, especially for those converting to Christianity.
- 3) Secularism is causing difficulties for Christians in the country. One country expert says: "The ban on the establishment of broadcasting services for religious purposes, as well as the ban on religious activities within educational institutions, restrict the freedom to worship, and the freedom to teach and preach one's religion."
- 4) In areas dominated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), cross-denominational converts face persecution from family, community and government officials if they are members of the EOC. Thus it is possible for the persecuted to act as persecutors in one and the same country.

How Christians are suffering

In Ethiopia all Christian communities are affected by persecution, although some denominations are more affected than others. Arrests are common in the country, with non-traditional Christians facing the harshest persecution both from the government and the EOC. Converts to Christianity from a Muslim background (particularly in eastern and south-eastern parts of the country) and cross-denominational converts from an Orthodox background face harsh mistreatment from their families and communities. In some areas, Christians are denied access to community resources and/or are excluded from society. In some places mobs attack churches.

Examples

- ▶ On 16 July 2017 a Muslim mob in Hirna, a rural town 400 Km east of Addis Ababa, attacked the local Full Gospel Church and partly damaged its roof and a wall before attacking a 27-year-old Christian man at his home with machetes. The mob was expressing its anger over evangelizing activity in the area.
- ▶ In the WWL 2018 reporting period there were numerous violent incidents against Christians reported. These included jailing, physical attacks, three killings, and damage to businesses.
- ▶ In April 2017 it was reported that Tigray State in northern Ethiopia is considering adopting a new law that would ban Christians from evangelizing outside church compounds and make it difficult for non-Orthodox Christians to own their own church or even meet in a house.



Where persecution comes from:

Persecution in Tunisia is caused mainly by the general hostility towards Christians evident in Islamic society. Even though, relatively speaking, the state has become more tolerant of Christians since the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011 there is a noticeable growing influence of Salafist teachings. Foreigners in Tunisia enjoy a good deal of freedom of religion but are restricted from engaging in openly evangelistic activities. The small community of Tunisian converts experience persecution from family members, relatives and the community at large and face difficulties with the state authorities in having their conversion to Christianity officially recognized.

How Christians are suffering:

A journalist who has investigated the situation of Tunisians Christians in depth states: "Tunisian Christians face discrimination and targeting that is often obscure and hidden to the public eye. It affects their day-to-day lives. Because of their Christian identities, many experience job insecurity, abandonment from family, friends and even fiancés; they are victims of verbal, mental and physical abuse, and are not given equal opportunities under the law to identify themselves as Christians and marry whoever they want."

Due to the factors mentioned above, most Tunisian Christians choose to hide their faith and cannot openly worship and live their lives as Christians. The hostility and pressure they face from society at large makes it dangerous to share their faith with their family members, relatives, neighbours, friends or colleagues. Tunisian Christians also find it difficult to gather for worship and fellowship due to the risks any possible exposure would entail.

Examples:

- ▶ A 29 year old Tunisian convert was expelled from the house he had built on land owned by his father. His family evicted him and refused to give him any payment for the money he had invested in building the house. He had previously been seriously injured when he was beaten up by youth belonging to radical Islamic group Ansar al-Shariah. He had also been arrested before by the police on various pretexts due to his Christian faith.
- ▶ A 23 year old Christian convert was not allowed to marry her German fiancé, a Christian, as she is still considered to be Muslim under Tunisian law and is therefore prohibited from marrying a non-Muslim.



Where persecution comes from

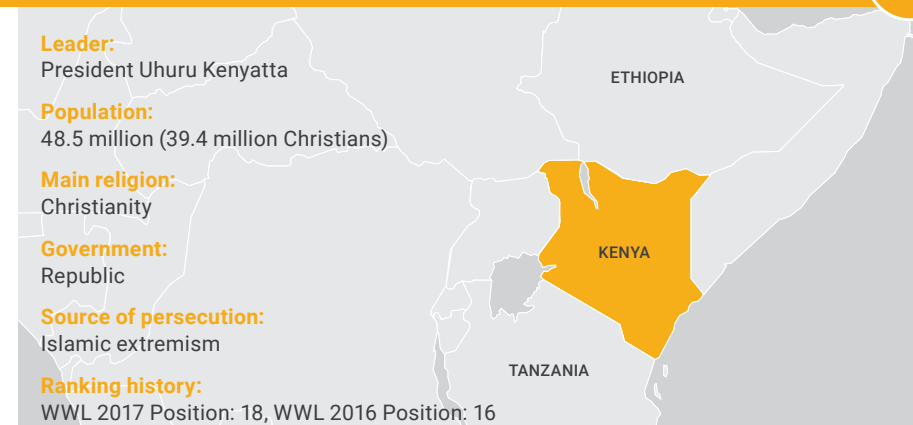
Turkey is the only country in the world where Islam is totally blended with fierce nationalism. In general, the opinion is that a true Turk must be a Sunni Muslim. This religious nationalism has grown to new heights after the failed coup of 15 July 2016. President Erdogan has used the situation to enlarge his power and position. He is trying to transform Turkey from a secular state into a Sunni Muslim one, leaving little space for minorities. On a more local level, there is strong opposition from families of converts to Christianity as leaving Islam is considered betrayal of the Turkish identity, Islam and the family. This kind of oppression is viewed as "normal" and it is hardly reported or documented unless there is physical violence.

How Christians are suffering

The very strong religious nationalism in society puts a lot of pressure on Christians. Converts from Islam to Christianity in particular face social opposition, although conversion from Islam to Christianity is not legally forbidden. Converts from Islam are put under pressure by their families and communities to return to Islam. Christians therefore sometimes lead a double life and hide their conversion. Although converts from Islam can legally change their religious affiliation on ID cards to Christianity, it can be a difficult and stressful process. Once discovered, a Christian with a Muslim background may be threatened with divorce and the loss of inheritance rights. The cocktail of Islam and nationalism also affects Christians who do not have a Muslim background. These are mostly from ethnic minorities (e.g. Greeks, Armenians, Syriacs). They are hardly regarded as full members of Turkish society and encounter all kinds of legal and bureaucratic obstructions. Christians have no access to state employment, and experience discrimination in private employment. Since religious affiliation is recorded on every ID card, it is very easy to discriminate against Christian applicants.

Examples

- ▶ Changes in leadership of the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic churches must be given government approval, though these religious communities and positions do not exist in law.
- ▶ Training of Christian leaders is legally impossible. It is almost impossible to register as a new church, although small congregations can register as 'associations'.
- ▶ According to World Watch Monitor reporting in June 2017, US Pastor Andrew Brunson is still imprisoned since October 2016 and is being held hostage in order to extract political concessions from the United States.
- ▶ According to above reporting in July 2017, legal ownership of at least 100 ancient Syriac Christian properties in Turkey's southeast has been seized and transferred to the Turkish state treasury over the past five years.



Where persecution comes from

Persecution in Kenya comes from different sources:

- 1) The strongest driver of persecution is the Islamic militant group called al-Shabaab. This group, even though based in Somalia, has conducted numerous attacks targeting Christians in majority Christian Kenya. The Muslim minority (approximately 10-15% of the total population) is mainly located in the north-eastern and coastal areas of Kenya, and it is this area that has been the main focus for attacks. Many Christians in the aforementioned regions have fled the areas and relocated to other places.
- 2) Some of the country's tribal leaders, especially in the north-east region are at times anti-Christian.
- 3) The government's attempt to enforce secularism is also at times harsh on churches and Christians as they are required to do things that are not in line with their faith.
- 4) Corruption is rampant in Kenya. Co-opted officials in particular turn a blind eye to persecutor's activities.

How Christians are suffering:

In Kenya all Christian communities are affected by persecution. Particularly Christians with a Muslim background in the northeast and coastal regions live under constant threats of attack. In the reporting period Christians were beheaded in their village. It was reported that al-Shabaab has infiltrated the locals and Christians in those areas are spied on. However, organized corruption and crime is also a serious problem. Co-opted officials do not take measures against those who persecute Christians, and this in turn encourages further acts of persecution.

Examples:

- ▶ In some parts of the north-eastern and coastal regions Christians are denied access to community resources. In these places, Christians are also detested and isolated.
- ▶ The level of violence, especially in the form of faith-related killings, was very high in the WWL 2018 reporting period. Dozens of Christians were killed at the hands of Islamists.
- ▶ In the period 5 – 8 July 2017, seven Christians were killed when al-Shabaab militants attacked the villages of Pandanguo, Jima, and Poromoko in Lamu County. All of them refused to recite the Shahada (an Islamic creed declaring belief in Allah's uniqueness and the acceptance of Muhammad as God's prophet).



Where persecution comes from

In their effort to maintain national identity and unity, government authorities suppress or eliminate 'foreign' elements, which is what Christianity is perceived to be. The government upholds Buddhist beliefs as the country's national heritage in managing the country. The merging of ethnic beliefs with Buddhism has caused Buddhist (and sometimes even Hindu leaders) to persecute Christians. This is especially true for Christians in the central and eastern part of the country. For converts, family members are another strong driver of persecution.

How Christians are suffering

Buddhism (partly mixed with traditional religions) is seen as the country's heritage and thus all Bhutaneese are expected to follow Buddhism. Converts will at least be watched with suspicion, but in most cases efforts will be made to bring them back to their old religion. Religious leaders, the community and the family involved often cooperate in this. Local authorities often deny Christians (or make it very difficult for them to obtain) a "non-objection certificate". This is needed for loan applications, registering property, applying for jobs and the renewal of ID cards. No churches have official recognition by the state. There have been debates about possible registration for some groups, but this has not yet led to any results. This means that Christians are technically worshipping illegally, baptisms cannot be held in public and Christian burials are often denied.

Examples

- ▶ Despite her good performance in exams, one young student was forced to repeat her final year for no other reason than that she was known to be a Christian.
- ▶ Two house-churches were forced to close down and cease meetings having received warnings and threats from the authorities. (For security reasons, information on time and places are withheld.)
- ▶ One of the traditions of farmers in Bhutan is community planting and harvesting, where several farmers share the workload and help each other. Christian farmers are usually excluded from this practice.



Where persecution comes from

Christians experience persecution at all levels of society: The government, the local community and even one's family, especially for converts from Islam to Christianity. No other religion than Islam is seen as an acceptable faith. Kuwait's society is bound by conservative Islamic norms, enforced by ordinary citizens, radical Islamic groups and a government that will bow to the demands of the radical groups as long as their power-base is not threatened.

Kuwaitis find the idea that religion can be separated from social and political life quite incomprehensible. Sharia law prescribes a wide range of rules for personal, family and community life. Although the Constitution has a provision about religious freedom, it also states that the practice of freedom of religion should not violate established customs, public policy or public morals, thus leaving little space for Christian community life.

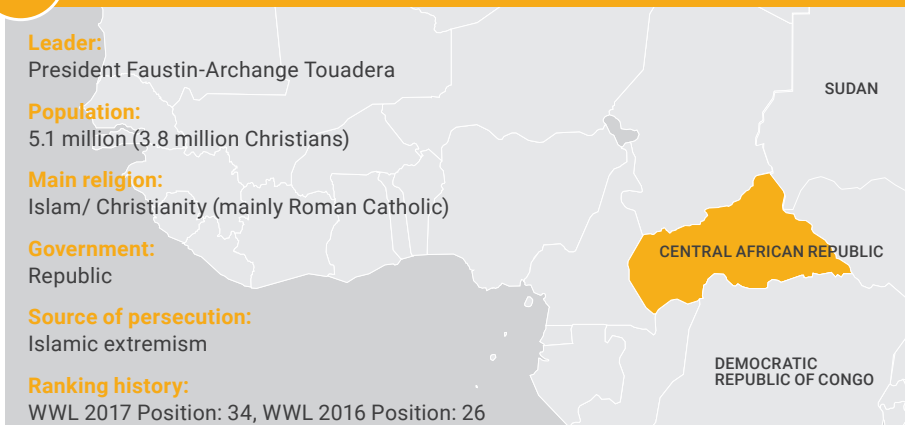
How Christians are suffering:

Expatriate Christians are relatively free to worship informally. However, the existing places registered for worship are very small for the number of people gathering. Obtaining property for gathering for worship is extremely difficult.

Converts from Islam bear the brunt of persecution as they face pressure from both family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. They risk discrimination, harassment, police monitoring of their activities, and all sorts of intimidation by vigilante groups. Moreover, a change of faith (away from Islam) is not officially recognized and is likely to lead to legal problems in personal status and property matters. Despite this, there are hardly ever reports of Christians being killed, imprisoned or harmed for their faith.

Examples:

- ▶ The government requires Islamic religious instruction for all pupils in state and private schools. Teaching Christianity in schools is prohibited, even to legally recognized Christian groups.
- ▶ According to Amnesty International Report 2016/171, a new cybercrime law has further restricted online expression, penalizing criticism of the government, the judiciary and others with up to 10 years' imprisonment. This gives an indication of the restrictive environment Christians live in.
- ▶ In the same report, Amnesty International writes that the Kuwaiti Parliament has recently approved an electronic media law regulating all online publications, including social media and blogs, placing them under a legal obligation to obtain a government license to operate. This law makes it difficult to share the Gospel online, bearing in mind that, according to the Constitution "the practice of freedom of religion should not violate established customs, public policy or public morals".



Where persecution comes from

Although the CAR is a country with a Christian majority, there is a significant Muslim minority concentrated particularly in the north-eastern part of the country. Since 2013 the country has been affected by civil war. One of the major warring factions is the militant Seleka group which has mobilized Muslims from a historically marginalized part of the country. This conflict that has pitted the Seleka against the anti-Balaka (a militant group that is made up of animists and nominal Christians) has been a source of persecution for Christians. Churches and pastors have been attacked and faced threats mainly from the Seleka but also from the anti-Balaka. Christians with a Muslim background in predominantly Muslim parts of the country have also faced pressure from their family and community due to their Christian faith. The conflict and instability in the country makes converts especially vulnerable for persecution and violence.

How Christians are suffering

Christians in the CAR suffer from the violence and atrocities that are committed by the militant groups, who have caused the death, injury and displacement of many Christians. The situation in the country has also made it difficult for Christians to worship in freedom since church leaders and buildings have been violently attacked. Christian leaders who have denounced the violence have been threatened and church buildings have been burned and ransacked. The conflict has resulted in the displacement of thousands of Christians who have been forced to live in camps and lose their homes and livelihood. In addition to the insecurity and violence from which all Christians suffer, converts to Christianity also face the persecution that comes from their immediate family members. The local community will often exclude Christian converts and might also try to force them to renounce Christianity through violence.

Examples

- ▶ One 16 September 2016, members of the Seleka militia assaulted and robbed a group of fifteen pastors who were conducting a seminar and looted the church in which the seminar was being conducted. This incident occurred just a day after the Seleka had looted two Catholic churches and killed about nine people including a Catholic priest in the town of Kaga Bandoro.
- ▶ On 7 February 2017 Pastor Jean-Paul Sankagui of the Eglise du Christ en Centrafrique (ECC) was killed by militants and his church was demolished in the capital Bangui. The attack took place in the PK5 neighbourhood (which has been the site of most of the conflicts in the city).
- ▶ An attack by the Seleka militia in October 2016 in the city of Kaga Bandoro resulted in the death of 23 Christians and the displacement of 14,000 Christians to a nearby camp for internally displaced people.



Where persecution comes from

Like other Palestinians, Christians experience restrictions from the Israeli side, on a daily basis. Their religion puts them in a minority position within the Muslim-majority Palestinian community. Although the Palestinian Territories are considered as a union, there are de facto two different areas: Laws in the West Bank generally protect religious freedom, whereas those in Gaza (ruled by Hamas) are restrictive. Governments in both areas are not actively persecuting Christians; in the West Bank, Christians even have positions within the (local) government. Yet, the Palestinian society is conservative. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is in particular unacceptable. Changing from one church denomination to another is also controversial.

How Christians are suffering:

There are three main groups of Christians, each facing their own problems:

- 1) The traditional churches are the biggest group. They have good connections with the ruling Palestinian Authority, but they have to be diplomatic in their approach towards Muslims in general, especially now that the influence of radical Islamic ideology is growing since the appearance of the Islamic State group and other radical Islamic groups. The biggest daily problems for these Christians consist of struggles with the Israeli government, such as travel and visa issues. Also, there were incidents reported of harassment of church leaders by Jewish extremists.
- 2) The Evangelicals number is small, but they have quite some influence through organizing conferences, providing theological education and doing outreach. They struggle with the limitations from the Israeli side too, but also with resistance from the traditional churches. This is partly caused by different theological views, in particular when it comes to the status of Israel. The traditional churches see the Evangelicals as more in favour of Israel. "Church-changers", mostly from traditional churches to Evangelical churches sometimes experience pressure.
- 3) Converts from Islam to Christianity bear the brunt of persecution, as their conversion will not normally be accepted by their communities and families. It is difficult for them to connect to the existing churches, as the latter are afraid of repercussions from the Muslim population. Due to the Israeli restrictions (with the resulting poor economic situation), combined with the fear of growing Islamic radicalism the number of Christians remaining is shrinking rapidly due to emigration.

Examples:

- ▶ During the WWL 2018 reporting period it was reported that a convert in Gaza had been physically assaulted by his family. He remains hidden in a safe place.

Leader:
President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita

Population:
18.7 million (413,000 Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Republic

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: 32, WWL 2016 Position: 44



Where persecution comes from

Although Malians traditionally have practiced a relatively tolerant version of Islam, over the past few years a more militant and intolerant version of Islam has become influential especially in the northern part of the country and has resulted in an intense persecution of Christians. Militant Islamic groups in the northern part of the country, aided by foreign fighters linked to al-Qaida, took over a significant portion of the northern part of the country in 2012 and although these groups have been pushed out of most of the territory they occupied, their influence is still felt. In addition to the radicalization of the Muslim population such groups have caused, the ongoing insurgency of these groups still poses a threat to Christians in the country.

How Christians are suffering

When radical Islamic militant groups took control of the northern part of the country in 2012, churches were burned down and Christians had to flee. The displacement of Christians that occurred still affects Christians who lost their homes and whose churches were destroyed. Although some Christians and congregations have returned to the north under police protection, they still live under the threat of attack by Islamist militants. Evangelistic activities in the north are especially risky and could lead to being attacked by radical Muslims. Christian missionaries operating in Mali also live under the constant threat of abduction and some have indeed been kidnapped by the jihadists. Christians with a Muslim background, risk violence (especially in the north) and pressure from their relatives and family members if their conversion to Christianity is discovered.

Examples

- ▶ On 16 November 2016, suspected Islamic militants shot and killed the Christian deputy mayor of Kerana. Moussa Issah Bary was a rare example of a Christian member of the predominantly Muslim Fulani ethnic group which is one of the most prominent Muslim ethnic groups in the whole of West Africa.
- ▶ Three foreign missionaries have been kidnapped in recent months by a consortium of Islamic groups that includes Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, Al-Mourabitoun and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM): The Colombian nun, Gloria Argoti, was kidnapped on 7 February 2017 in the southern part of the country which is normally considered safe. The Australian missionary, Ken Elliott, was kidnapped in Djibo in northern Burkina Faso, right on the border with Mali in January 2016. Also in January 2016, the Swiss missionary, Beatrice Stockly, was kidnapped in the northern city of Timbuktu.

Leader:
President Joko Widodo

Population:
263.5 million (31.9 million Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Republic

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism/ Religious nationalism

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: 46, WWL 2016 Position: 43



Where persecution comes from

Some Islamic religious leaders instigate hatred against Christians and other religious minorities via their teaching in mosques. This occurs in the mass media too. Conservative Muslim political parties push their agenda for an Islamic nation. Often their representatives are behind the drafting and passing of Sharia-inspired policies, including in the field of education. Radical Islamic pressure groups like the FPI are more influential. They are able to mobilize hundreds of thousands on the streets, last witnessed in the large demonstrations (regularly in the period September 2016 – May 2017) against Jakarta Christian governor "Ahok" because of alleged blasphemy. This is a reason why the government per se is not a driver of persecution at the national level, although in August 2017 it announced plans to tighten the country's blasphemy legislation.

How Christians are suffering

Many converts from Islam experience persecution from their families. The intensity of the persecution varies and is mostly in the form of isolation, verbal abuse, etc. Only a small percentage of converts face physical violence for their Christian faith. The level of persecution depends on the region; there are certain hot spots like West Java or Aceh, where radical Islamic groups exert heavy influence on society and politics.

Once a church is seen to be proselytizing, as many evangelical and Pentecostal churches do, they run into problems with radical Islamic groups. Typically, they also experience difficulties getting permission for building churches. Even if they manage to fulfil all legal requirements (including winning court cases), local authorities still ignore them. There have also been reports of Catholic churches having difficulties obtaining building permission. The situation for Christians has deteriorated in the course of recent years.

Examples:

- ▶ On 13 November 2016, an attacker threw a Molotov cocktail into the church premises of Oikumene Church in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, killing a two-year-old girl and wounding three children under the age of four.
- ▶ On 9 May 2017, the Christian governor of Jakarta was sentenced to two years in prison due to an alleged case of blasphemy occurring in a speech in September 2016.
- ▶ Several converts to Christianity have been detained by their families and had their cellphone taken from them. Most are isolated for several weeks and can be expelled from the home once it is clear that the conversion is serious.
- ▶ In some regions, Muslim families regularly forbid their children to play with Christian friends. They are called infidels and are sometimes mocked by Islamic religious teachers and made to sit in the back row of the school classroom.

Leader:
President Enrique Peña Nieto

Population:
130.2 million (124.9 million Christians)

Main religion:
Christianity (mainly Roman Catholic)

Government:
Federal Republic

Source of persecution:
Organised corruption

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: 41, WWL 2016 Position: 40



Where persecution comes from

There are different forms of persecution in Mexico and the lack of protection for Christians has increased as a result of the strong presence of corruption at all levels of government. The most violent dimension is seen in the attacks by criminal groups against priests and pastors. Leaders of indigenous communities are also responsible for attacking Christian converts in particular. Secular ideology has become more dominant in society through the increasing influence of fanatical movements who are trying to eliminate religious expression from the public domain, especially regarding the defence of unborn life and family. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church still enjoys certain privileges and this generates situations of disadvantage and conflict with other Christian groups.

How Christians are suffering

All churches are affected by persecution in Mexico but not all experience the same sort and intensity of persecution. Secular intolerance affects all Christians and those expressing their Christian convictions in public debates are frequently victims of harassment, criticism and ridicule. Churches active in areas controlled by organized crime experience how criminal groups attack churches, issue death-threats and murder Christian leaders with the aim of intimidating them and silencing them, as the Christian ministries are considered a threat to their ends. In indigenous communities it is not unusual that Christian families are punished for leaving the tribal customs and expelled from their homes. Finally, Christian denominations outside the Catholic Church are affected because they do not enjoy the same privileges and are made to feel inferior.

Examples

- ▶ In 2017, members of the indigenous communities of Chiapas and Jalisco who became Protestant Christians faced economic sanctions, denial of access to basic services and expulsion from the community. In some cases, Christians were imprisoned without reason and suffered psychological mistreatment.
- ▶ Reports on 6 July 2017 state that a Roman Catholic priest was killed in a church of the municipality of Los Reyes La Paz, in the State of Mexico. 18 priests have been murdered since President Enrique Peña Nieto took office in 2012. According to Church in Need, Mexico ranks number one in attacks on Roman Catholic priests for the sixth consecutive year, with most deaths occurring where priests work in drug-trafficking areas.

Leader:
President Zayed Al Nahyan

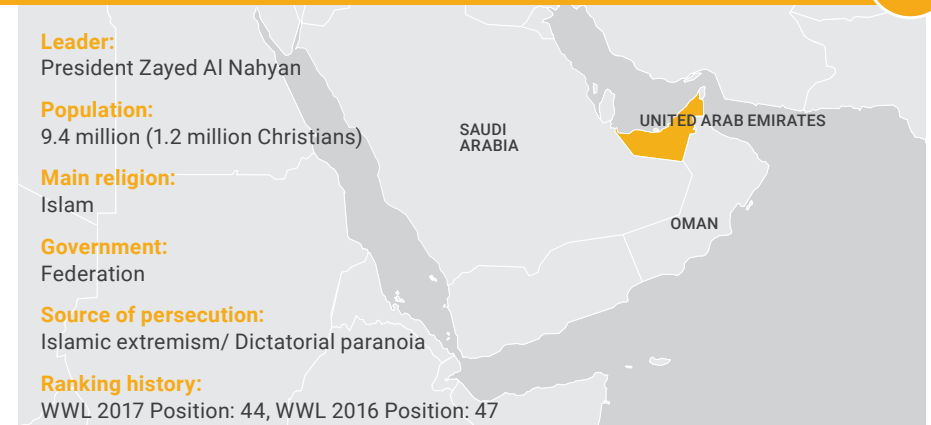
Population:
9.4 million (1.2 million Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Federation

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism/ Dictatorial paranoia

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: 44, WWL 2016 Position: 47



Where persecution comes from

Emirati society is fairly tolerant towards the Christian expatriate communities, and these are relatively free to worship. On the contrary, converts from Islam to Christianity face a lot of pressure. They are mostly persecuted by their families and the surrounding society, making it unnecessary for the government to act against them. In this way, the government can actively preach and promote religious tolerance, while at the same time promoting Islam.

How Christians are suffering:

Although the Christian expatriate communities (like the Hindu and Sikh communities) are relatively free to practice their faith, they also face restrictions. They are free to worship in private but the government does not allow them to worship, preach or pray in public. Furthermore, the Emirati society is conservative, forcing Christians to exercise self-restraint in public. They have to be careful in their public contacts, especially because proselytizing Muslims in any way is strictly prohibited. Converts from Islam endure the most persecution as they face pressure from family members and the local community to recant their Christian faith. This severe pressure makes it almost impossible for converts to reveal their conversion. This is probably the reason why there are hardly any reports of Christians being killed or harmed for their faith.

Examples:

- ▶ According to the International Religious Freedom Report of the US State Department, in January 2016 local authorities arrested and deported three non-citizens accused of proselytizing, in the emirate of Sharjah. Although the report does not name the religion of the three accused, it indicates how the government enforces the laws prohibiting the proselytization of Muslims.
- ▶ According to the International Religious Freedom Report, the country's two primary internet service providers, both majority owned by the government, continued to block certain web sites critical of Islam or supportive of religious views the government considered extremist, including Muslim sites. The service providers continued to block other sites on religion-related topics, including some with information on Judaism, Christianity, atheism, and testimonies of former Muslims who converted to Christianity.
- ▶ There are too few churches in the United Arab Emirates to meet the demands. Although the ruling Emirati families donated land to build churches on, it remains difficult to establish churches. Religious organizations are not required to register with the government, but a lack of clear legal designation results in an ambiguous legal status for many groups and created difficulties in carrying out certain administrative functions, including banking or signing leases.

Leader:
President Abdul Hamid

Population:
164.8 million (866,000 Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Parliamentary democracy

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism/ Religious nationalism

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: 26, WWL 2016 Position: 35



Where persecution comes from

As the number of Christians from a Muslim background is growing, they face restrictions and difficulties with radical Islamic groups, local religious leaders, and families. There are fatwas implemented all over the country, especially in rural areas, and there are demands to introduce Sharia law in order to show that the country belongs to the "House of Islam". Local government officials create various obstacles for Christians, but the notable trend of the rise of attacks by the Islamic State group in the country has been countered by stricter inspection by the authorities and by security forces going into action against such groups.

How Christians are suffering

Converts from a Muslim, a Hindu or an ethnic/tribal background suffer the most severe persecution in Bangladesh. They often gather in small house churches or secret groups due to fear of attack. Evangelistic churches - many of them Pentecostal - working among the Muslim majority face persecution, but even historical churches like the Roman Catholic Church are increasingly faced with attacks and death threats. Tribal Christians like the Santals, face a double vulnerability (belonging to both an ethnic and religious minority) and struggle with land-grabbing issues and violence directed against them.

Examples

- ▶ In November 2016, more than two dozen church leaders and aid workers in Bangladesh say they received death threats. In early October 2016, three Roman Catholic priests reported that they had narrowly escaped attempts on their lives.
- ▶ On 6-7 November 2016, about 2,500 Santal squatters, mostly Christians, were violently forced off disputed land in the Sahebganj area by workers from the Rangpur Sugar Mill with support from local police. In the clashes three Christian squatters were killed, 30 are reported missing and dozens were wounded. The attackers also looted the homes and livestock of tribal people and set fire to about 600 squatter homes. This illustrates that persecution can have economic motives as well.
- ▶ Christian children have been pressurized into studying the majority religion's textbooks. The Bangladesh Government distributes Islamic textbooks to all schools but teachers are not given adequate supplies of Christian textbooks to use in class.
- ▶ After conversion to Christianity, former Muslims are frequently hindered from sharing community resources because of their faith. They are often hindered from working and one case was reported where the community even blocked the road.

Leader:
President Abdelaziz Bouteflika

Population:
41.1 million (68,500 Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Republic

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism/ Dictatorial paranoia

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: 36, WWL 2016 Position: 37



Where persecution comes from

A major source of persecution in Algeria is the intolerance of relatives and neighbours towards Christians with a Muslim background making it hard to live out their Christian faith. The state also adds to this pressure through its laws and administrative bureaucracy restricting the freedom of religion. The persecution Christians face is also reinforced by the tension between Amazighs and Arabs, since most of the growth of the Algerian church is taking place in the Kabylie region among Amazighs (who are also referred to as ethnic Berbers). The influence and activity of radical Islamic groups in the region is also a source of danger and persecution for Algerian Christians.

How Christians are suffering:

Christians in Algeria suffer from various restrictions and challenges that are imposed on their freedom of religion be it by the state or society. There are laws that regulate non-Muslim worship and ban conversion from Islam, and there are also blasphemy laws that make it difficult for Christians to share their faith out of fear that their conversations may be considered blasphemous. Christians also suffer from harassment and discrimination in their daily life. Members of the extended family and neighbours try to force converts to adhere to Islamic norms and follow Islamic rites. The pressure and danger faced by Christians is particularly high in the rural and religiously more conservative parts of the country. These regions acted as a stronghold for Islamist rebels in the fight against the government in the 1990's.

Examples:

- ▶ The family of a 70 year old Christian man called Amar who died on 30 October 2016 in the city Tizi-Ouzou were forced by the local imam and other villagers to bury Amar according to Islamic religious rites.
- ▶ Over the last years, several churches in the Kabylie region in which Christians with a Muslim background congregate have been ordered by the authorities to cease all religious activities for being in violation with a 2006 law, regulating the religious activity of non-Muslims.
- ▶ Slimane Bouhafs who was arrested for insulting Islam on 31 July 2016 and is serving time in prison has suffered from the aggressive harassment of other prisoners because of his faith.



Where persecution comes from

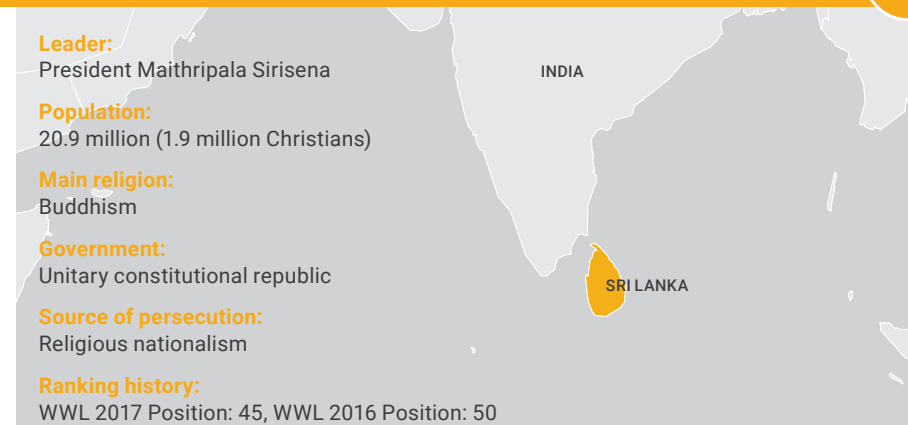
The small numbers of Christians from a Muslim or a Tibetan Buddhist background face persecution, which comes from religious leaders – who are still very influential in autonomous Xinjiang and Tibet – as well as from the community they live in and their own parents. Conversion is seen as betraying a community. The Communist authorities are responsible for limiting all freedoms in the instable provinces mentioned above, but not just there. In their effort to control society and to stay in power, Communist authorities limit Christians as they are the largest social force in China not controlled by the state. Control increased in the WWL 2018 reporting period as some house-churches have been pushed to join the state-controlled Three Self Churches. The new law on religion is scheduled to be implemented from 1 February 2018.

How Christians are suffering

If a convert from Islam or Tibetan Buddhism is discovered by community and family, they are usually threatened, physically harmed and reported to the local authorities, all in an effort to win them back. Spouses may be forced to divorce and children can be taken away from Christian parents. Public baptisms are out of question and since family events such as weddings or burials are organized by imams or lamas, they refuse to conduct such rites once it is known that it involves a convert. Government-approved churches can be targeted just like any other church, once they are perceived as being a threat, i.e. by becoming too large, too political, by inviting foreign guests or by disturbing the local authorities in some other way. A policy of “sinicizing” (to make Chinese) the church is becoming increasingly influential as the Communist Party is relying strongly on Chinese cultural identity to stay in power. The new restrictions on internet and social media, the new NGO law and the new regulations on religion are all seriously limiting freedom.

Examples

- ▶ Lamas in rural areas have a great influence as many of them are local government officials. They allocate resources to families in the communities. If someone is known as a convert, he is excluded.
- ▶ Christian organizations are not allowed unless they are run under the support of registered churches, which excludes the larger part of Chinese Christianity from getting involved in social action in an organized way.
- ▶ In August 2017, several buildings, belonging to a Catholic church in the Shanxi province were destroyed, despite efforts by church members to protect them. Homes of believers were raided and belongings confiscated in Guangdong, Xinjiang, and Anhui. Churches have been raided and landlords renting premises to churches have been pressured to terminate such contracts.



Where persecution comes from

The main drivers of persecution are radical Buddhist movements, at times supported by (local) officials. Although the election of a new government in 2015 led to a slight reduction in the activities of the Bodu Bala Sena group, other movements such as Sinha Le became active and gained strength. They claim Sri Lanka as a Buddhist Sinhala nation; they also had a wide sticker campaign promoting this ideology. BBS transformed into a political party, but was not particularly successful in this until now. Although BBS focused more on attacking the Muslim minority, Christians and churches are attacked frequently as well. Family members together with village officials in the rural areas have verbally abused and asked Christian converts to leave the village.

How Christians are suffering:

Converts from a Buddhist or Hindu background suffer the strongest forms of persecution. They are subject to harassments, discrimination and marginalization by family and community. They are put under pressure to recant Christianity as conversion is regarded as betrayal: All ethnic Sinhalese (the majority in Sri Lanka) are expected to be Buddhist. Similarly, within the minority Tamil population in the northeast, you are expected to be Hindu. The Christian minority is partly tolerated, but converts to Christianity are not. Additionally, non-traditional churches are frequently targeted by neighbours, often joined by Buddhist monks and local officials, with demands to close their church buildings which they regard as illegal. Again and again, this ends up with mobs protesting against and attacking churches, especially in rural areas.

Examples:

- ▶ Christian school-children are forced to study Buddhism or Hinduism. There have also been reports that children were forced to participate in Buddhist rituals.
- ▶ On 5 January 2017 a mob, supposedly led by a Buddhist monk, attacked the Kithu Sevana prayer center in Paharaiya, north-western Sri Lanka. The church leader there reported: “First they threatened us verbally. Then they came with wooden sticks, iron bars and knives and destroyed everything.”
- ▶ In March 2017, a group of about 50 people, including Buddhist monks, forced their way into the Christian Fellowship Church in Ingiriya, Kalatura District, demanding that the Christians stop holding services and accused them of disturbing the peace. When the pastor returned home from the police station a mob was waiting for him and the windows of his house were smashed.



Where persecution comes from

Most of the persecution of Christians in Azerbaijan comes from government officials at various levels – ranging from the country's central government that imposes restrictive legislation to local authorities and police, who raid religious meetings, detain believers and confiscate religious materials. Another source of persecution comes from the Muslim environment (family, friends, community and local imams) which opposes evangelism among Muslims.

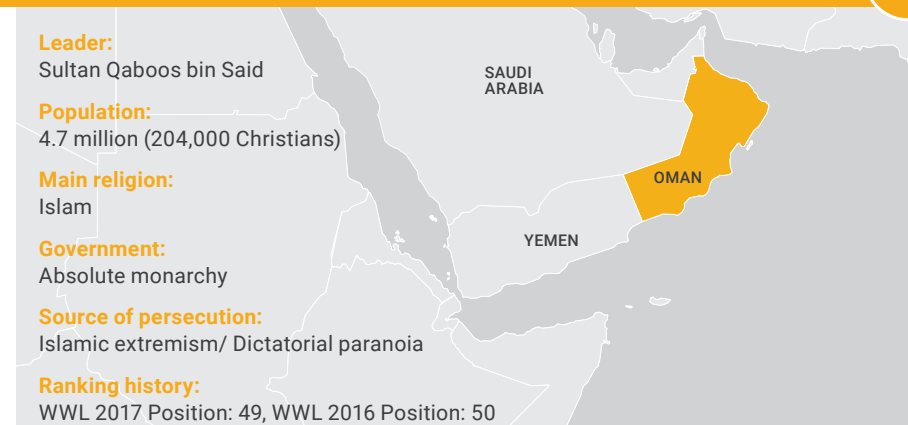
How Christians are suffering

All Christian communities are experiencing some form of persecution. Russian Orthodox churches experience the least problems from the government as they do not usually attempt to make contact with the Azerbaijani population. It is the indigenous Christians with a Muslim background who are bearing the burden of persecution both at the hands of the state and from family, friends and community.

The government of Azerbaijan monitors the activities of religious groups closely. Officially, the country is secular and religion is tolerated. However, the level of surveillance is so high that Christians in Azerbaijan do not know whom to trust anymore. Very little information is getting out of the country. Another sign of the level of government pressure is the fact that Azerbaijani Christians find it easier to evangelize in countries like Georgia and Iran than in their own country.

Examples

- ▶ In November 2016, a group of Christians (men, women and children) gathered for an unregistered prayer meeting in the pastor's house in a village in Azerbaijan. Police raided the house and all church members had to stay for hours for questioning. The police made a list of everyone's passport data and compiled a list of all literature in the house. Then the Christians were taken to the district police station before being released.
- ▶ In December 2016, two Baptists in the northern Zakatala District were fined for leading worship services without state permission. Religious literature confiscated from them was sent to the capital Baku for alleged "expert analysis". (Source: Forum 181)
- ▶ Religious literature and other materials can be sold or distributed only at registered outlets. All religious literature produced in, published in (including on the internet) or imported into Azerbaijan is subject to prior compulsory censorship. The State Committee then specifies how many copies can be produced or imported. All religious materials sold must have a sticker noting that they have State Committee approval. State officials have repeatedly denied that this represents censorship. (Source: Forum 182)



Where persecution comes from:

As in other Gulf countries, Islam dominates Oman's society, politics and legal system (Sharia law). However, due to the dominance of Ibadism, an Islamic sect only practiced by a majority in Oman, it is a country where Christians and even converts from Islam do not face any violent repercussions. Ibadism has been characterized as "moderate conservatism," with tenets combining both strictness and tolerance. According to experts, the followers of the Ibadi sect are non-violent in comparison to Sunni or Shiite Muslims. They do not believe in violence, even towards those who leave Islam or who are not Muslims.

Nevertheless, Omani society is conservative and tribal relationships are important. Tribe and religion are interconnected; leaving Islam is therefore seen as betrayal of both tribe and family and both will put pressure on a convert to return to Islam.

The Omani government actively promotes religious tolerance, in contrast to neighbouring countries. However, this does not alter the fact that public law is based on Sharia law, allowing the freedom of religion only as long as it does not violate established customs, policy or public morals. Furthermore, the non-democratic government keeps its citizens, especially minorities, under strict surveillance.

How Christians are suffering:

Expatriate Christian communities are tolerated in Oman, but all religious organizations must be registered with the authorities. Their facilities are restricted in order not to offend nationals and Christian meetings are monitored to record any political messages and nationals attending. Furthermore, it is difficult to build and register new churches.

Converts from Islam to Christianity are put under pressure from family and society to recant their faith. They can be expelled from the family home and from their jobs and they have to take precautions to avoid discrimination, harassment, and bullying. There is also legal discrimination to contend with; for example, it is stated in the family code that "a convert husband will lose his right to custody upon divorce".

Although the Islamic State group has suffered major set-backs recently, its radical ideas still influence Omani society. Unconfirmed reports have indicated that Islamic State networks are emerging in the country, which is particularly worrying for the Christian community.

Examples:

- ▶ Public proselytizing is forbidden; it can only be done privately. Some converts and expatriate Christians involved in proselytization were called in for questioning.
- ▶ Non-Muslim religious groups must register with the government which then approves and controls the leases of building to such groups.

Leader:
President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz

Population:
4.26 million (10,000 Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Islamic republic

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: , WWL 2016 Position: Not on the list



Where persecution comes from

Mauritania's official name is "the Islamic Republic of Mauritania" and its autocratic government often tries to garner legitimacy by projecting itself as a protector of the Islamic religion. Therefore, the state is a major source of persecution. Radical Islamic preachers contribute greatly to the radicalization of society and fuel antagonism and hatred towards non-Muslims. Radical Islamic militants are also active and present in the country. The existence of a caste system in the country that privileges certain groups and justifies the bondage and slavery of darker skinned Mauritians is also justified by invoking Islam. Hence, those who are more privileged vigilantly oppose any other worldview that could disrupt the status quo, including Christianity.

How Christians are suffering

Indigenous Christians with a Muslim background - especially outside the capital - are vulnerable to the most intense forms of persecution. In addition to the pressure, exclusion and risk of violence they face from their family and the wider community, if their Christian faith is discovered they could also be charged with "apostasy" which carries the death penalty in Mauritania. Any expression of faith by non-Mauritanian Christians (e.g. migrants from sub-Saharan Africa or aid-workers) also carries the risk of being prosecuted under the laws of the country that criminalize proselytization of Muslims. In addition to the risk of prosecution by the authorities, Christians in Mauritania also face the risk of violence by militant groups such as Al-Qaida in the Maghreb. There have also been occasions where mobs have staged demonstrations demanding that the government investigate Christians for alleged offenses against Islam.

Examples

- ▶ Due to security issues, only publicly reported incidents can be mentioned. A Christian aid worker and his daughter were shot by a suspected radical Islamic militant in 2001. Another Christian aid worker was shot and killed in a crowded market in the capital city in 2009.
- ▶ In April 2012 Muslim protesters demanded that the government investigate allegations that Christians had burned the Quran and distributed copies of the Gospels.
- ▶ An internet blogger (not a Christian) was arrested in January 2014 for criticizing Islam. In April 2016 his conviction and death sentence for apostasy was upheld. The government has refrained from carrying out the sentence for a number of years causing some preachers and local businessmen to put out a significant bounty for anyone killing the blogger.

Leader:
Sheikh Hamed bin Isa Al Khalifah

Population:
1.4 million (188,000 Christians)

Main religion:
Islam

Government:
Constitutional monarchy

Source of persecution:
Islamic extremism/ Dictatorial paranoia

Ranking history:
WWL 2017 Position: 48, WWL 2016 Position: 48



Where persecution comes from

This mainly Shia-Islamic country, ruled by a royal Sunni family, is relatively tolerant in general because of its international position in banking and trade. However, it is illegal for Christians to proselytize Muslims. The rulers of this Gulf State have managed to consolidate their powers through repressive means. The state authorities thus restrict all freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Because Bahraini society is conservative, leaving Islam is seen as betrayal and both tribe and family will put pressure on a convert to return to Islam.

How Christians are suffering:

Bahrain is a country in which Christians experience high pressure in all areas of life. The constitution officially grants freedom of religion, but this is a limited provision as it also states that the practice of the freedom of religion should not violate established (Islamic) customs, public policy or public morals. A considerable number of expatriate Christians (mainly from South Asia) work and live in Bahrain and are relatively free to practice their faith in private places of worship. However, they do experience a high level of surveillance from the government and the security services. Converts from Islam bear the burden of persecution as they face pressure from family members and local community to recant their Christian faith. Despite this, there are hardly ever reports of Christians being killed, imprisoned or harmed for their faith.

Examples:

- ▶ An example of the ongoing pressure from the government on the Bahraini society can be found in the ratification by King Hamad of an amendment to the constitution at the beginning of April 2017. It empowered military courts to try civilians if the latter are involved "in acts of terrorism or violent crimes". According to the government, this step was needed to fight terrorism, but according to Amnesty International, the wording of the amendment is so vague, that it can be easily used against any perceived opposition (which could include Christians).
- ▶ During the state of emergency in 2011, when the government tried to suppress mass demonstrations, the military courts were well-known for unfair trials and the use of torture to obtain confessions.

Leader:

President Juan Manuel Santos

Population:

49 million (46.6 million Christians)

Main religion:

Christianity (Roman Catholic)

Government:

Republic

Source of persecution:

Organised corruption/ Ethnic antagonism

Ranking history:

WWL 2017 Position: 50, WWL 2016 Position: 46

**Where persecution comes from**

In a country affected by corruption, it is the leaders of criminal groups (drug cartels and dissident guerrillas) who are the main agents of persecution. Leaders of indigenous communities who perceive Christians as wanting to impose their worldview and take over their territory are also persecuting Christians.

How Christians are suffering

Persecution against church communities is particularly violent when coming from criminal groups who feel threatened when Christians stand up against the reign of fear they are trying to impose on society. They issue death-threats to the Christians (and their families) involved in evangelizing activities. Many Christians are forced to pay a "protection tax" as a kind of insurance against being assaulted or killed. This violence is particularly evident where former members of gangs have converted to Christianity. There is also violent persecution in indigenous communities, where Christian churches are seen as threatening the existence of ethnic customs and worldview. In the situations mentioned above, Christians are thus prevented from freely congregating and sharing their faith and - due to the absence of State authority officials - are subjected to the constant risk of attack from those holding power locally.

Secularist ideology has also spread greatly through media broadcasts and political debate, in which Christian values are criticized and Christians are ridiculed when they try to participate in public debate especially concerning gender, marriage and unborn life. Also, Christians of non-traditional churches are clearly being disadvantaged in society and are most affected by the government privileges (in matters of funding and registration) in favor of the Roman Catholic Church. This has become more evident in the run-up to the Pope's visit in September 2017.

Examples

- ▶ During the months of June and July 2017, many Christians in indigenous communities were denied access to basic services in an attempt to get them to renounce their faith and return to the traditional religion. 17 Christian churches were also attacked by indigenous leaders to prevent the spread of Christianity within the ethnic group.
- ▶ Despite peace-negotiations with the government, criminal groups belonging to guerrilla units remain active and, in some areas, have become stronger. On 16 May 2017 a Catholic priest in Buenaventura received death-threats after denouncing some of the criminal activity in his region. On 28 July 2017 a priest in Raudal (Antioquia) was found murdered. Due to the rising fear and insecurity, many Christians and other citizens flee their homes after receiving threats from criminal groups.

Leader:

President Ismail Omar Guelleh

Population:

911,000 (11,100 Christians)

Main religion:

Islam

Government:

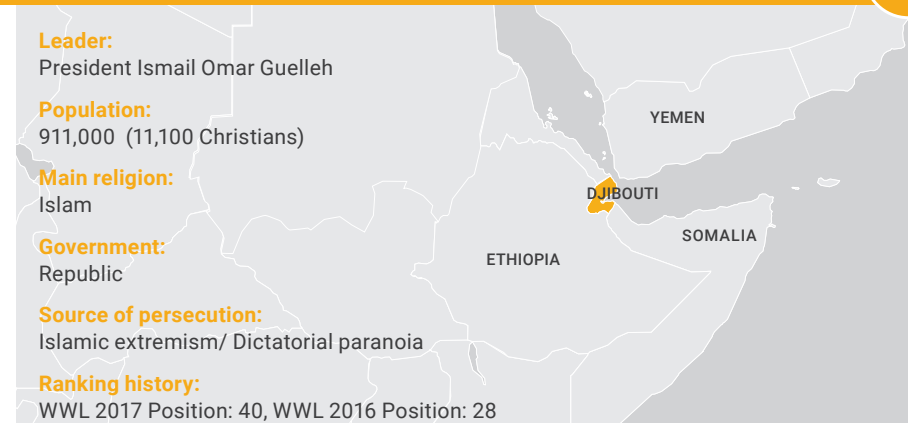
Republic

Source of persecution:

Islamic extremism/ Dictatorial paranoia

Ranking history:

WWL 2017 Position: 40, WWL 2016 Position: 28

**Where persecution comes from**

Government officials, family members, community leaders and some Muslim (religious) leaders are all drivers of persecution in Djibouti. The undemocratic and paranoid government of the incumbent president seeks to control all aspects of society by stifling freedom of association, freedom of religion and freedom of expression. One of the reasons why the situation for Christians in Djibouti is precarious is the geographical location of the country itself. Djibouti is located in the Horn of Africa and is surrounded by volatile countries with repressive governments like Eritrea, Somalia and Yemen. It acts as a transit zone for radical Islamic thought and jihadists.

How Christians are suffering:

Djibouti's Constitution declares Islam to be the state religion. All laws and policies in the country are shaped by Sharia law and any law or policy inconsistent with Sharia is useless and invalid. All Christian communities in the country thus face difficulties. However, the level of persecution that Christians with a Muslim background experience is immense and comes both from the local community and their own family members. Hiding one's faith is one means of protection but the communal lifestyle makes this very difficult. If one converts to Christianity or there are rumours of a possible conversion, that person will lose any inheritance rights and is also likely to have difficulty claiming custody of any children. They are monitored by their families, people from the mosque, and other community members. The local authorities do not properly protect Christians if they are attacked.

Examples:

- ▶ Most Djiboutians are conservative Sunni Muslims and have strong family ties in Somalia and Yemen. These families do not tolerate any conversion to another religion.
- ▶ Some imams are using Friday sermons to ridicule Christians and Christianity.
- ▶ Christians - especially converts from Islam - face hindrances in their social interactions.
- ▶ In the WWL 2018 reporting period, there was no violence against Christians reported.

WORLD WATCH LIST 2018 - TOP 50

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life
Rank	Country	Score	Score	Score	Score
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7
3	Somalia	16.0	16.2	16.1	16.3
4	Sudan	14.2	14.5	14.3	15.6
5	Pakistan	14.4	13.5	13.8	15.0
6	Eritrea	15.2	14.5	15.8	16.1
7	Libya	15.2	15.3	14.2	15.7
8	Iraq	14.7	14.7	14.9	14.9
9	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.4	16.5
10	Iran	14.0	14.1	14.5	15.8
11	India	12.6	12.7	13.2	14.7
12	Saudi Arabia	14.9	13.7	14.2	15.5
13	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.8
14	Nigeria	11.8	11.5	13.1	12.1
15	Syria	14.4	14.3	14.1	14.5
16	Uzbekistan	15.5	12.1	13.0	13.1
17	Egypt	11.3	12.8	12.2	11.7
18	Vietnam	12.4	8.4	12.7	14.2
19	Turkmenistan	15.2	10.3	12.9	12.8
20	Laos	12.9	8.6	13.6	13.9
21	Jordan	13.2	13.3	11.5	10.9
22	Tajikistan	13.3	11.3	11.8	11.8
23	Malaysia	12.0	14.9	12.8	12.4
24	Myanmar	11.6	11.1	13.2	10.4
25	Nepal	12.6	11.9	10.7	11.5
26	Brunei	14.3	14.2	10.7	10.2
27	Qatar	13.4	12.9	11.7	11.3
28	Kazakhstan	12.8	10.0	10.2	12.2
29	Ethiopia	9.8	10.0	10.8	10.9
30	Tunisia	11.9	13.2	10.6	10.7
31	Turkey	12.5	9.7	9.8	11.7
32	Kenya	12.0	10.9	10.0	7.9
33	Bhutan	11.9	11.6	12.4	11.4
34	Kuwait	13.4	12.6	11.6	10.9
35	Central African Republic	9.0	8.1	10.1	8.9
36	Palestinian Territories	12.1	12.8	10.7	10.5
37	Mali	11.4	9.6	11.2	8.1
38	Indonesia	10.3	11.0	11.5	10.0
39	Mexico	8.3	7.6	12.1	10.7
40	United Arab Emirates	13.6	12.2	10.0	10.4
41	Bangladesh	10.4	8.8	11.4	9.6
42	Algeria	12.3	13.1	7.5	10.4
43	China	9.2	7.2	8.0	10.7
44	Sri Lanka	11.1	7.6	10.5	11.3
45	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.1	9.3	11.1
46	Oman	12.1	12.2	9.9	9.4
47	Mauritania	11.5	11.3	11.1	12.2
48	Bahrain	12.9	13.1	10.2	9.9
49	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.9	8.6
50	Djibouti	12.2	12.2	10.3	9.9

5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2017	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2016	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2015	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2014
Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
16.7	10.6	94	92	92	92	90
16.7	10.0	93	89	88	81	78
16.4	10.4	91	91	87	90	80
16.0	12.0	87	87	84	80	73
13.1	16.7	86	88	87	79	77
15.2	9.4	86	82	89	79	72
15.5	10.4	86	78	79	76	71
15.1	11.3	86	86	90	86	78
16.7	2.6	85	85	78	73	74
16.4	10.0	85	85	83	80	77
12.9	14.4	81	73	68	62	55
16.4	4.1	79	76	76	77	78
16.7	1.1	78	76	76	78	77
12.1	16.5	77	78	78	78	70
14.7	3.7	76	86	87	83	79
16.0	3.5	73	71	70	69	68
9.5	12.4	70	65	64	61	61
13.8	7.4	69	71	66	68	65
15.2	1.9	68	67	66	63	62
14.9	3.5	67	64	58	58	62
13.0	4.3	66	63	59	56	56
12.9	4.3	65	58	58	50	47
9.3	3.9	65	60	58	55	49
11.0	7.8	65	62	62	60	59
12.4	4.6	64	(not in WWL)			
13.5	0.9	64	64	61	58	57
14.1	0.0	63	66	65	64	63
13.7	3.7	63	56	55	51	49
10.5	10.4	62	64	67	61	65
12.0	3.9	62	61	58	55	55
9.6	8.7	62	57	55	52	(not in WWL)
11.7	9.4	62	68	68	63	48
13.1	1.1	62	61	56	56	54
12.3	0.4	61	57	56	49	50
8.8	16.1	61	58	59	67	67
12.6	1.1	60	64	62	58	53
9.2	9.6	59	59	55	52	54
9.3	6.9	59	55	55	50	46
9.7	10.4	59	57	56	55	(not in WWL)
11.8	0.2	58	55	55	49	51
7.5	10.0	58	63	57	51	46
12.4	2.0	58	58	56	55	54
13.3	9.1	57	57	57	57	51
10.1	6.9	57	55	(not in WWL)	51	55
12.4	2.4	57	(not in WWL)	57	50	(not in WWL)
12.6	1.1	57	53	53	55	56
11.0	0.0	57	55	(not in WWL)	50	51
10.3	0.2	57	54	54	(not in WWL)	48
8.5	11.9	56	53	55	55	56
11.7	0.0	56	57	58	60	46

FOUR OPTIONS FOR CHRISTIANS WHEN HIT BY PERSECUTION

When persecution strikes, how do Christians respond? For persecuted Christians around the world there are four main options.

1. Register and submit

In some places, it is possible to register a church and deal with the authorities. Depending on the conditions, this could be beneficial although it means the state having a say in church affairs.

In **China** today many Christians are in state-organised churches. They have freedom to worship, but within limits. Many decisions who to invite to the country, who may travel, what may be published or preached, what can be taught at seminaries, are supervised by the authorities. Nevertheless, there are many strong Christians in these churches. Even some house churches, while technically illegal, can practise their faith relatively openly, having reached an understanding with local authorities over what is permissible.

2. Dive and survive

In some countries the church has to go deep underground and keep clear of the persecutors. The advantage is that you avoid jail and stay alive. The disadvantage is that Christianity has little chance to influence cultural change or be passed on from generation to generation.

In **Afghanistan**, this is the only choice. All Afghan believers are secret converts from Islam. Leaving Islam is seen as apostasy, and anyone suspected of converting to Christianity is arrested. The result is that there is no visible church; only God knows how many secret believers there are in Afghanistan.

3. Flee and live

Many believers who convert to Christianity from a tribe or another religion have to flee in order to save their lives and the lives of their families.

In **Somalia** at least 12 believers from a Muslim background were killed in 2016. As a World Watch researcher said, "This is a very tight society. If you stop going to the mosque, it is really noticed after a couple of weeks. You get told to come. If you don't, you'd better leave if you want to live."

4. Stay and die

In extreme cases, a Christian may simply decide that their best option is to stay and suffer the consequences. Even if it means their death.

In **North Korea** this has been the reality for many, many Christians. If a secret church is discovered, everyone is taken to the death camps, including all relatives of the families – even if they have not been involved in worship activities. One Christian was found in possession of a Bible and taken to prison. A friend said of him, "When he came to faith, he made the decision that one day he would die for Christ. Every Christian in North Korea has made that choice."

You can read more about what life is like for Christians in these countries at www.opendoors.fi



HIGHLIGHTING CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION AROUND THE WORLD

World Watch List - Open Doors International



Open Doors USA and Syrian Christians meet with US government officials in Washington; Pam Pryor (Senior Advisor at the Under Secretary, for Civilian Security, Democracy & Human Rights) to highlight the religious right and survival of Christians in the Middle East.



Open Doors UK met with PM Theresa May together with Iraqi priest Father Daniel, who presented a burned Arabic Bible found in St Mary's shrine in Karamles, Iraq. The survival of the Bible symbolises the hope which the Christian community in Iraq continue to hold on to.



The Danish government set aside 2 million yearly until 2021 for protection of religious minorities with a special focus on the Christian minorities. At the meeting was among others Open Doors, Anders Samuelsen Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ulla Thørnæs Minister of Development and Nazer Khader member of parliament.



Open Doors UK and Ireland's CEO and chairman, Lisa Pearce, met with former Prime Minister Cameron to discuss the worldwide persecution of Christians



Open Doors USA and Syrian Christians meet with Sarah Makin (Director Public Engagement & Intergovernmental Affairs for the Vice President) & Steve Pinkos (Deputy Director of Policy, Office of the Vice President) in the White House after having delivered over 800.000 signatures to UN from Christians around the world in protection of Christians in the Middle East.

A. QUICK Q&A ON THE WWL

How is the WWL compiled?

World Watch Research (WWR) distinguishes two main expressions of persecution: squeeze (the pressure Christians experience in all areas of life) and smash (plain violence). While smash can be measured and tracked through incidents of violence, squeeze needs to be tracked by discerning how Christian life and witness is being squeezed in different areas of life. Different persecution engines and drivers become identifiable from the answers to country questionnaires covering the reporting period 1 November – 31 October. A final score is calculated for each country which is then used to determine the order of countries from position 1 to 50 on the annual WWL.

Why are countries with the same score ranked differently?

For each country, the public version of the WWL Table and Scores (p. 60-61) gives the Total Score as a rounded number displaying no decimal places. In the event that countries are listed with the same score (e.g. in WWL 2017 Syria and Iraq; Iran and Yemen) the actual decimal fraction will determine which country appears higher in the list.

WWL 2017 RANK	Country	1. Private	2. Family	3. Community	4. National	5. Church	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORES DISPLAYED TO 3 DEC. PLACES	WWL TOTAL SCORES
6	Syria	14.375	14.263	14.664	14.584	14.896	13.704	86.486	86
7	Iraq	15.104	14.904	15.465	15.104	15.209	10.370	86.156	86
8	Iran	14.063	14.343	14.744	15.625	16.459	10.185	85.419	85
9	Yemen	16.667	15.305	14.503	16.341	16.615	5.926	85.357	85

Extract from WWL 2017 Table and Scores with added column showing Total Score to three decimal places

Please note that from WWL 2018 onwards, the final Block scores appearing in the official WWL Table and Scores will be displayed only to one decimal place and not to three decimal places as was previously the case. The fraction is the result of mathematical calculation. As far as scoring the answers of the questionnaire is concerned, it would be misleading to understand a greater number of decimal places as denoting a greater degree of accuracy in persecution measurement.

Why does World Watch Research use World Christian Database statistics?

Since 2007, the World Christian Database (WCD) has been published in cooperation with Brill publishers (USA) who aim to meet the information requirements of specialized academic target groups. For an annual fee, World Watch Research receives access to comprehensive statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups. This information is updated regularly by staff at the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (USA). Please note: Where Open Doors estimates differ to WCD figures, this is clearly indicated in the WWL 2018 country profile documentation and in the WWL 2018 Country religious statistics.

What gives the WWL credibility (academic status)?

The WWL team consists of one managing director, five fulltime and two part-time persecution analysts and one communicator, all with university degrees. Three of the team (including the managing director) have or are completing PhDs. Five are lawyers with experience in the field of human rights, constitutional law or governance. The persecution analysts collaborate closely with researchers and other experts operating at regional, national and subnational level. Some of these are Open Doors staff, others are external experts who have different professional backgrounds. The WWL questionnaire is the main tool behind the WWL methodology. The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF; www.iirf.eu) has audited the WWL methods for arriving at country scores and their transnational comparability. It has also audited their proper application on varying sample countries for WWL 2014-2018. The main focus of the audits is on consistency in the processing of the WWL questionnaires for the different countries with their specific persecution situations.

The WWL audit statements express IIRF’s conclusions and enhance the quality of the WWL and contribute to the degree of objectivity and transparency of the results. The IIRF stresses that additional statements, documents and interpretations by Open Doors based on or associated with the publication of the WWL lists remain outside the scope of their audits.

How is it possible to measure and compare persecution in different countries?

The pressure on Christians and the violent incidents occurring against Christians can be compared from country to country regardless of the origin of the hostilities involved. This is possible because the WWL Methodology takes as starting point the pressure and violence Christians experience in different spheres of life. Whether this pressure or violence originates from the same or different persecution engines is not relevant for the final score, though it is for the country narrative.

Is Christianity the most persecuted religion in the world?

No one is claiming that ONLY Christians are suffering severe persecution. However, there is little data comparable to the WWL available. The number of persecuted Christians is huge – well over 200 million – and the likelihood is very great that more Christians are suffering severe persecution than adherents of any other religion. There is, however, no academic research on the persecution of Muslims currently available to confirm this.

How many Christians are persecuted worldwide?

Since WWL 2017, the calculation for the number of persecuted Christians is linked to the annual WWL and indicates the number of Christians who are persecuted in the 50 countries on that specific WWL. This number will therefore change according to the exact composition of the annual WWL. For WWL 2017 the calculation was as follows: In the WWL Top 50 countries the total population is 4.83 billion and the total number of Christians is estimated at 650 million (13%).

Out of these 650 million Christians, 215 million (33%) are considered to be suffering from “high” (or “very high” or “extreme”) levels of persecution, according to the levels set out in the WWL-Methodology.

One can also say: 215 million are considered to be suffering from “high” (or “very high” or “extreme”) levels of persecution, out of a total global Christian population of 2.48 billion, or 1 in every 12 Christians. For WWL 2017 it was not possible to supply an accompanying Level 3 version of the break-down per country. WWR will attempt to do this for WWL 2018. Because the number of persecuted Christians used in WWL documentation is limited to the 50 countries on the WWL, it will mean that - globally - there are more Christians who are persecuted.

How many Christians are killed for their faith annually?

There is an ongoing debate about the number of martyrs or Christians killed for faith-related reasons. While some organizations publish numbers often as high as 100,000 Christian martyrs per year, or ‘one Christian killed every 5 minutes’, research by WWR reveals much lower numbers. (The numbers in the table below are global totals recorded within the WWL reporting period.)

WWL	Christians killed for faith-related reasons	Churches attacked
WWL 2014	2,123	1,111
WWL 2015	4,344	1,062
WWL 2016	7,106	2,425
WWL 2017	1,207	1,329
WWL 2018	See Article on Violent Incidents (available 8 December 2017).	

The numbers listed above are likely to be much lower than in reality, but they are based on what WWR have been able to assess via a variety of sources (reports of OD Field research and external research, and media reports).

How does OD’s definition of persecution compare with other definitions?

There is no international legal definition of persecution. Situations can be defined as persecution where persons experience the denial of the rights listed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For defining the persecution of Christians, the WWL methodology has opted for a theological rather than a sociological definition. Persecution is hence: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians.” This definition covers not just violence but also the full range of pressure experienced by Christians as a result of their Christian faith.

Many lawmakers have tried to set a high threshold before a situation can be termed persecution. E.g., United States Court of Appeals, Third Circuit (1961) states: “[Persecution] should be taken to

mean confinement, torture or death inflicted on account of race, religion, or political viewpoint.” However, the rationale behind this is clearly political: If the standard was not set high, it might lead to a situation where the international community has to face the serious challenge of affording protection to very large numbers of people claiming ‘persecuted’ status. Hence the international community is deliberately underestimating the continuous pressure Christians (and other minorities) are often facing in their different spheres of life. It is exactly this pressure that the WWL methodology seeks to document and therefore its definition deliberately includes “hostile attitudes [and] words”.

Does ethnic cleansing apply to countries in the WWL Top 50?

Ethnic cleansing is when a competitor or those who differ in race, ethnicity or religion are forced to leave a given area by unlawful means. These can be murder, destruction of property, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, extra-judicial executions, rape and deliberate military or other organized attacks, or threats of attacks on civilians or even genocide. The situations in northeast Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan can be said to be typical examples.

It should however be noted that even in contexts not defined as conflict, ethnic cleansing can be in process. Saudi Arabia is an example of this, notwithstanding the massive presence of Christian migrants in the country. The enormous pressure on converts from Islam to Christianity and isolation of Christian migrants from local Saudis, could be charactized as a form of ethnic cleansing based on religious affiliation. The concept of ethnic cleansing based on religious affiliation can thus be applied to (part of) what is happening in a number of the WWL Top 50 countries.

Are only Christians who evangelize persecuted?

Not at all. Normally the first victims of persecution are converts to Christianity. Take for instance converts to Christianity from a Muslim background: Even when society is not yet Islamized and the nation’s government has not yet adopted Sharia law, converts are very vulnerable in their private, family and community spheres of life. (The same applies for defectors from a criminal gang, although their community sphere of life is likely to be more problematic than their private and family spheres of life.) Next, it is Christians who are active in evangelism or social-political work in the public domain who are likely to experience hostility. When the persecution situation develops further, Christians by identity are affected too. Finally, the visibility of Christianity in the public domain in the form of churches and other Christian buildings is reduced by targeted destruction and closure.

Does the WWL sometimes confuse civil conflict with persecution?

Commentators often look at the situation of civilians in civil conflicts and ignore the role of religious identity on the side of the victim and religious motivation on the side of the perpetrator among the complex mix of factors and motives for hostilities against civilians. Detailed research shows that religion often plays an important or even decisive role, without which the situation cannot be fully or correctly understood. This applies even when religion is not the only factor. Hence, according to WWL research, conflicts such as those in Central Africa, Nigeria, Iraq and Syria are (at least in part) situations involving the persecution of Christians on grounds of faith.

Worldwide petition for protection of Christians in Syria and Iraq

808.172 people from 143 countries signed the Hope for the Middle East petition.

Their signatures form a global cry, urging world leaders to ensure that Christians and other minorities in Iraq and Syria are guaranteed the right to equal citizenship, dignified living conditions and a prominent role in reconciling and rebuilding society.

These calls come directly from the Christians of Iraq and Syria who long to stay and rebuild their community continuing their 2,000 year history of contributing to the life of the region.

The Hope for the Middle East petition with the 808.172 signatures and an appeal was handed to the United Nations the 11th December 2017 in New York with the hope that UN too will fight for Christians in Syria and Iraq and their right to live and believe.



What is the World Watch List?

The World Watch List uses data from Open Doors field workers and independent experts to track the deep structures of Christian persecution. It measures the degree of freedom Christians have to live out their faith in five spheres of life; private, family, community, national and church

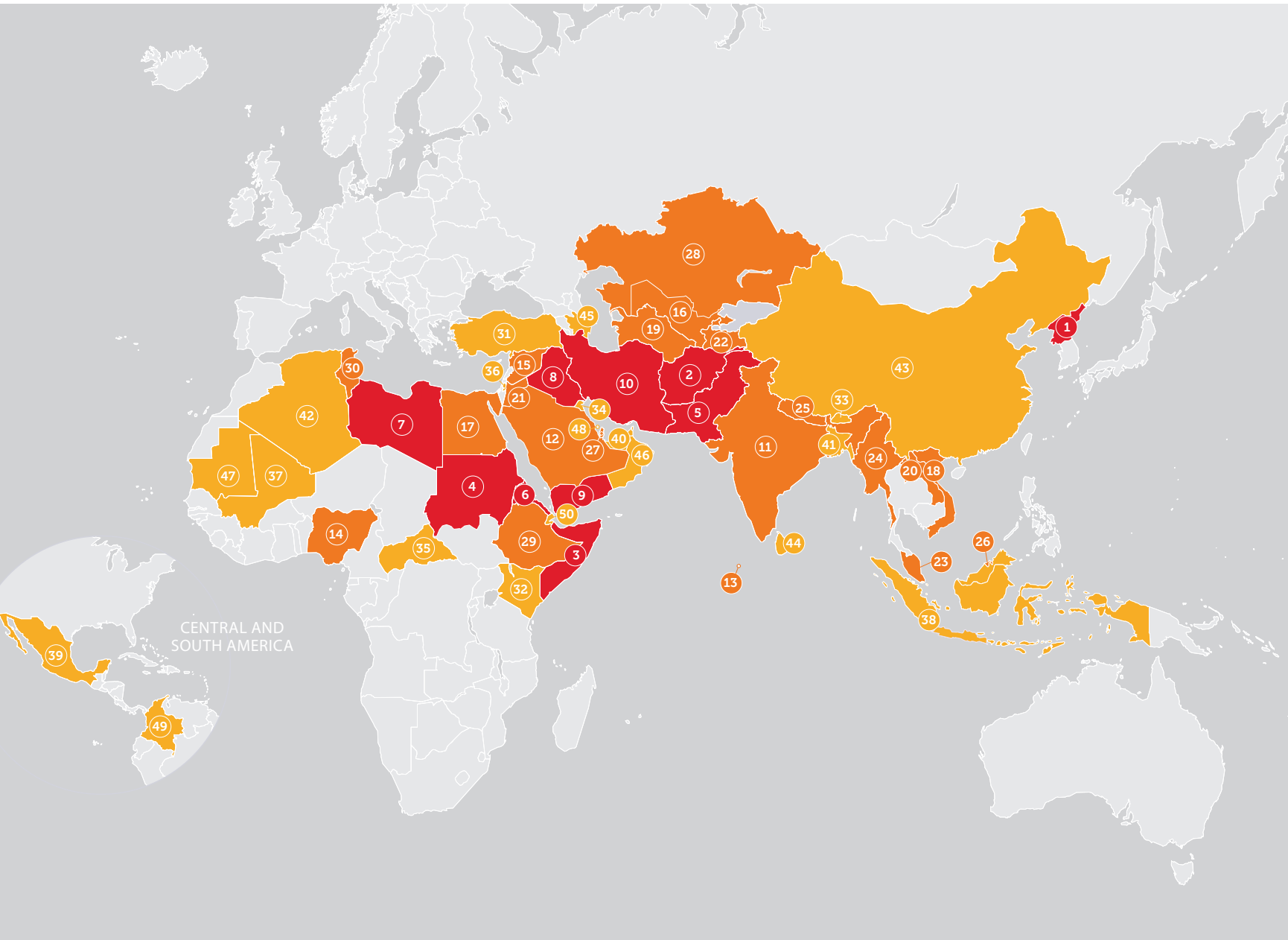
life, and a sixth sphere measuring the degree of violence. The data is translated into points and countries are ranked accordingly. All data relates to the period 1 Nov 2016 to 31 Oct 2017. The list is independently audited by the International Institute of Religious Freedom.

Every effort has been made to ensure all information is accurate at the time of publication.

Sources: *Open Doors International; Population statistics sourced from UN DESA Population Division, World Christian Database.*

Colour Key:

- Extreme levels of persecution
- Very high levels of persecution
- High levels of persecution



01. North Korea
02. Afghanistan
03. Somalia
04. Sudan
05. Pakistan
06. Eritrea
07. Libya
08. Iraq
09. Yemen
10. Iran
11. India
12. Saudi Arabia
13. Maldives
14. Nigeria
15. Syria
16. Uzbekistan
17. Egypt
18. Vietnam
19. Turkmenistan
20. Laos
21. Jordan
22. Tajikistan
23. Malaysia
24. Myanmar
25. Nepal
26. Brunei
27. Qatar
28. Kazakhstan
29. Ethiopia
30. Tunisia
31. Turkey
32. Kenya
33. Bhutan
34. Kuwait
35. CAR
36. Palestinian Territories
37. Mali
38. Indonesia
39. Mexico
40. UAE
41. Bangladesh
42. Algeria
43. China
44. Sri Lanka
45. Azerbaijan
46. Oman
47. Mauritania
48. Bahrain
49. Colombia
50. Djibouti



Open Doors helps millions of persecuted Christians in over 60 countries including some of the most dangerous places in the world where being a Christian means facing abuse, beatings, imprisonment, discrimination and even death.

Every January Open Doors publishes the World Watch List, which highlights the top 50 countries, where it is most difficult to live as a Christian. Using data gathered from independent experts, reports from our partners and field employees, the World Watch Lists tracks the degree of freedom Christians have to follow their faith. It is a unique, in-depth record of the places where faith costs the most.

“Open Doors has shown the true signs of the presence of the spirit of Christianity in that it has been faithful to its vision and foundation, but adaptable as the world around it has changed. And, today, it is one of the most credible, powerful, authentic and determined advocates of the protection of Christians but also generally of religious liberty.”

Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby



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